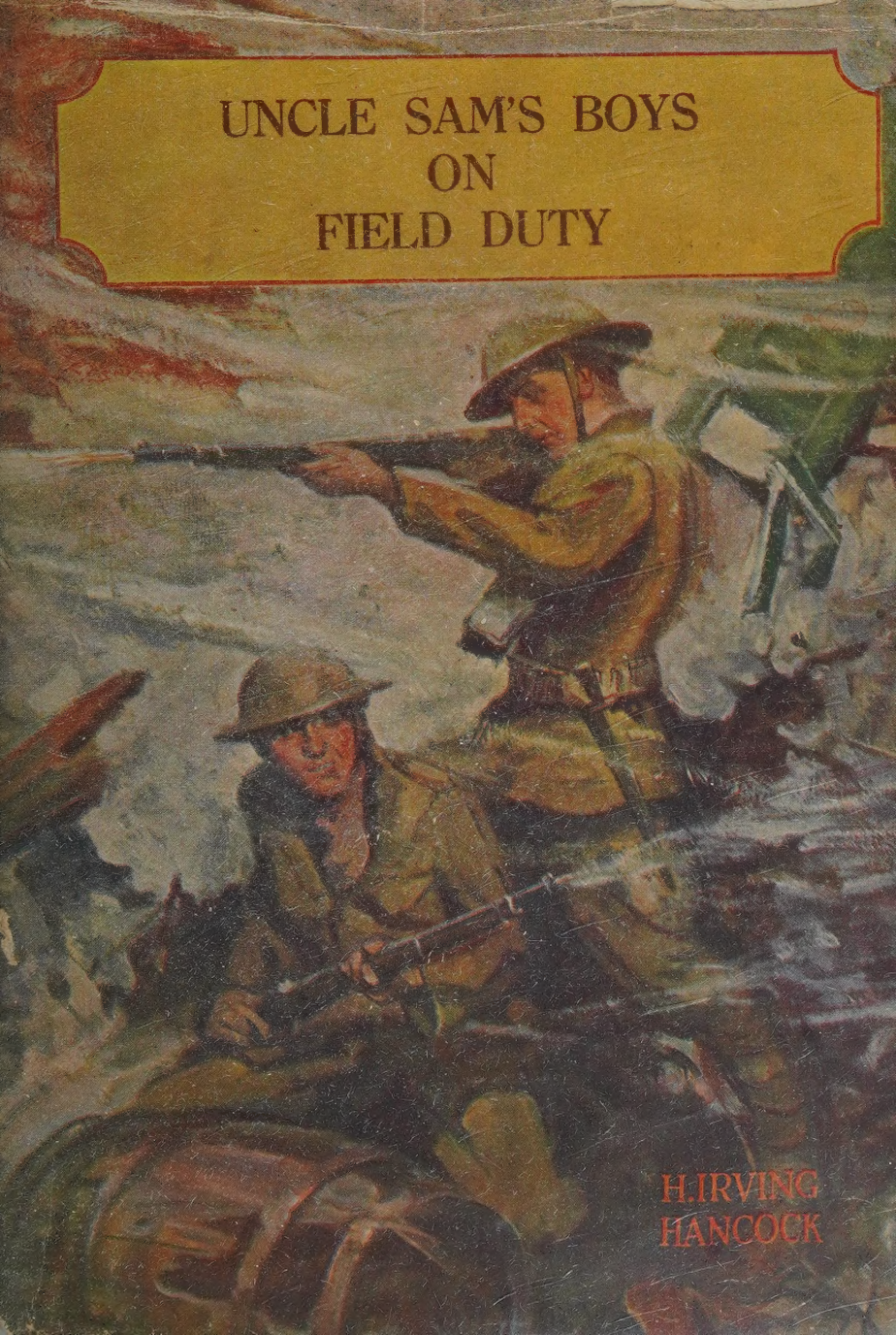
UNCLE SAM'S BOYS ON FIELD DUTY

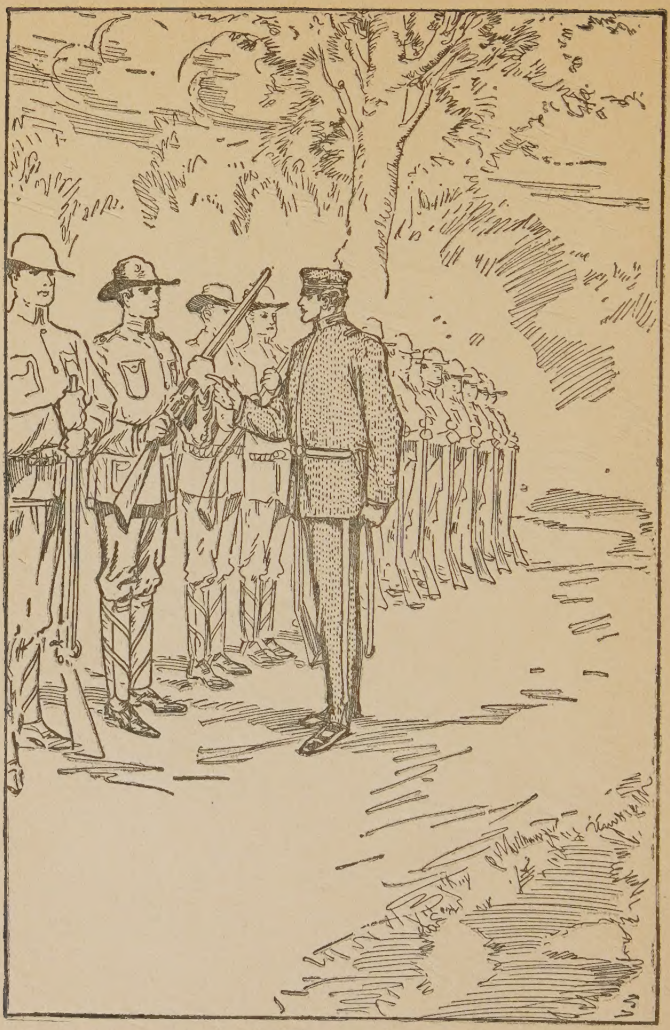


H. IRVING HANCOCK

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2025

https://archive.org/details/bwb_T5-ARI-247

CHS-(31)F.



"Let Me Look at That Bolt."

Frontispiece.

Uncle Sam's Boys on Field Duty

OR

Winning Corporal's Chevrons

By

H. IRVING HANCOCK

Author of The Motor Boat Club Series, The High School Boys' Series, The West Point Series, The Annapolis Series, Uncle Sam's Boys in the Ranks, Uncle Sam's Boys as Sergeants, Etc.

Illustrated

PHILADELPHIA
HENRY ALTEMUS COMPANY

Copyright, 1911, by
Howard E. Altemus

CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
I.	A Squad-room Misunderstanding	7
II.	On the Great Summer Hike	29
III.	Soldier Hal Marches as a Prisoner	47
IV.	The Joking Scout	54
V.	The Corporal With the Sheepish Grin	65
VI.	Raynes Finds a Patriotic Ally	77
VII.	Bears and Other Troubles	90
VIII.	In the Midst of the "Hostiles"	97
IX.	Planning for the Night Attack	103
X.	Trappers and Trapped	113
XI.	That C Company Corporal Eats Crow	119
XII.	The Call to Deadly Work	130
XIII.	The Appointment With Supreme Danger	138
XIV.	Meeting Blick in Earnest	145
XV.	The Battle of Their Lives	155
XVI.	Captain Cortland "Makes a Speech"	162
XVII.	Rounding Up the Missing Leave Men	171
XVIII.	Dowley Eggs On a Catspaw	184
XIX.	A Dispute in the Guard House	192
XX.	Promotion Flies in the Air	202
XXI.	The Price of Being a Man	211
XXII.	Two Young Corporals Send Out the "C. Q. D."	227
XXIII.	The Wind Changes Its Course and Blows	235
XXIV.	Conclusion	246

Uncle Sam's Boys on Field Duty

CHAPTER I

A SQUAD-ROOM MISUNDERSTANDING

"I SEE by the paper——" began Private Green, looking up.

Instantly the doughboys in the squad room turned loose on him.

"You can never believe what you read in the papers," broke in Private Hyman.

"Cut it and study your guard manual!" yelled another.

"Is it going to rain to-night, rookie?"

"Let him alone. He wants to prove that he can read," jeered another, which witticism brought a swift flush to the face of Private Green.

For Green was as verdant as his name. He was a new recruit, just in after his probationary period at a northwestern recruit rendezvous. He was so green, in fact, that the men in the squad room, and throughout B Company of the Thirty-fourth United States Infantry ac-

cused the young fellow of having joined the Army so that he could get a wall of bayonets between his own inexperienced self and the bunco men.

The young recruit's mistake lay in pretending to know a lot more than he really did know. He had been put through the unmerciful hazing that always awaits a very "fresh" rookie, or recruit, but even that had taught him little. Private Green was always looking for the chance to prove to his new comrades among the regulars of the Thirty-fourth that he knew something after all. This afternoon his trouble had taken the form of trying to find something in a two-days' old newspaper on which he could discourse for the enlightenment of the other men.

"I see by the paper," continued Private William Green, as soon as his tormentors would let him proceed, "that we of the United States are now manufacturing the biggest and finest guns in the world."

"Meaning cannon?" quizzed Private Hyman innocently.

"Sure," nodded Private William Green.

"Take that over to the red sheds," jeered one soldier.

"What do we of the infantry care about the red legs and their troubles?" demanded Hyman, as though affronted.

For the "doughboys," or infantrymen, of the regular Army, affect supreme scorn for all other arms of the service. In especial do they profess contempt for the artillerymen, or red legs, this latter epithet being derived from the fact that red is the artillery color, and that the officers and non-commissioned officers of the artillery wear red side stripes on their trousers.

"But think what it means to this country," insisted Private William Green, "when we manufacture the biggest guns in the world."

"And we have also the loudest-mouthed and noisiest members in the peace societies," remarked Private Hal Overton, laughingly.

"What have peace-spouters got to do with big guns?" demanded Private William Green rather stiffly.

"Why, you see," explained Hal, "the peace advocates look for the millennium."

"The mill—what kind of mill?" inquired Green, with unlooked-for interest, for Private Willie had been employed in a grist mill before enlisting.

"The mil-len-nium," explained Private Overton patiently, though with a twinkle in his eyes.

"Never heard of that mill," replied Private Green rather disdainfully. "What's it for?"

"Why, you see, Greenie—pardon me, I mean Willie," continued Hal Overton, while the other

soldiers in the squad room, scenting fun, remained silent, "it's like this: The millennium is the age that may come some time. The peace-spouters tell us that the millennium is coming in two weeks from autumn. That millennium is the age when all war will be abolished and soldiers will have to go to work."

"What's all that got to do with what I was talking about?" demanded Private Green, bewildered and half offended.

"Wait, and Overton will tell you," warned Hal's chum, Noll Terry, who stood by looking decidedly trim and handsome in his spotless khaki uniform.

"Of course you know all about Armageddon?" resumed Hal.

"Never heard of him," retorted Green suspiciously, for he saw the amused looks in the faces of some of the soldiers standing about. "Say—hold on! Is Army-gid-ap——"

"Armageddon," corrected Hal quietly.

"Is that the name of the new breakfast food that the rainmaker (Army surgeon) was trying to have sprung on the bill of fare of our company mess?"

"Oh, no," Hal assured him. "Nothing as bad as that. You see, Greenie—Willie, I mean—while the peace-howlers lay all of their bets on the millennium being just over the fence, there's

another crowd of high-brow thinkers who look forward to the great battle when all the armies of the world will be present. That battle is going to be the one grand fight of all history, and the armies of one half of the world are going to get a sure thrashing from the armies of the other half. Any way you look at it, it's surely going to be a big scrap, Willie, and after that maybe all soldiers will be too tired to fight any more. Now, for that great battle the high-brows have invented the name of Armageddon. Don't forget the name, Willie—Armageddon. It's going to be the biggest fight the world ever saw—the only real fight in history, as we'll look back at it afterwards."

"But what has all this got to do with what I was reading from the paper?" insisted Private Green.

"Why, don't you see, if we're making the biggest and finest guns, and Armageddon comes on, it'll be just like robbing a baker's wagon for us to win Armageddon. On the other hand, if millennium runs in first, and we don't need the guns, then we win, too. We've got the biggest guns for Armageddon, and the noisiest peace-howlers for the millennium. Armageddon or millennium, it's just as good a bet either way, for the United States is bound to win, going or coming."

Private William Green didn't see more than a tenth part of the point, but the laugh that followed got on his nerves.

"You fellows are nothing but a lot of horse-play idiots," he growled, rising and stalking away.

As he made his way through the little fringe of soldiers something happened to Private William Green, but Hal Overton was the only disinterested person who happened to see it.

William had joined the Army after toiling and saving for some four years. Green had saved his money, and hoped to save a lot more. He was known to have about four hundred dollars in cash, which he had so far declined to deposit with the Army pay-master. Where he kept this money was not known, beyond the fact that he sometimes carried it on his person.

Just as William was passing through the group of soldiers a hand ran expertly up under the loose hem of Private Green's blouse. A wallet left Green's right-hand hip pocket, coming away with the intruding hand. Then Private Dowley slipped the wallet into his own trousers' pocket.

Hal saw, and acted with his usual quickness.

"Don't do that, Dowley," Hal advised, moving forward and resting a hand on Private Dowley's shoulder.

"Don't do what?" demanded Dowley, turning scowling eyes on Hal.

"Give him back his wallet, Dowley. That's carrying a joke too far."

"I haven't——" was as far as Private Dowley got when Private William Green, who was twenty-two years old, tall, raw-boned, freckled and sandy haired, heard the word and clapped a hand to his own hip pocket.

"I've been touched—robbed—right in the heart of United States forces!" yelled Private Green, turning and staggering back.

"Give it back to him, Dowley," urged Hal.

"What do you mean? To say that I——" sputtered Dowley, clenching his fists as though he meant to hurl himself at Hal Overton.

But Private William himself settled the problem by hurling himself weakly at Dowley and running his hands over his comrade's clothing.

"There it is," yelled William. "My wallet—right in Dowley's trousers' pocket."

"Of course," nodded Private Hal. "Dowley did it as a joke, but it looks like carrying a joke too far."

Dowley, seeing that further denial was useless, broke into a guffaw. Then he thrust a hand into his pocket, producing the wallet. William Green pounced upon it with an exclamation of joy.

"I wanted to string Greenie," explained Dowley hoarsely, "but Overton had to go to work and spoil it all."

"The joke was in bad taste," observed Private Hyman quietly. "We don't want any work of that sort here, even for fun."

"What I marvel at," remarked Hal innocently, "is how you did the thing in such a smooth, light-fingered way, Dowley."

"Light fingered? You hound!" raged Dowley, his eyes blazing. "Do you mean that I did the trick with the skill of a crook?"

He placed himself squarely before the young soldier, crowding him back and glaring into Overton's eyes.

The other soldiers in the room found suddenly a new interest in the scene. Young Overton wasn't quarrelsome; he was the soul of good nature, in fact, but he knew how to fight when he had to do it.

"Stop walking on my feet," counseled Hal, giving Dowley a slight push that sent him backward a step.

"What did you mean?" insisted Dowley, who was working himself into a greater rage with every second.

"It's time to ask what you mean," retorted Hal.

"You called me a light-fingered crook, because

I played a joke on Greenie," roared Dowley. "And I'm going to make you eat talk like that."

"You're putting a wrong construction on my words," returned Hal quietly.

"You called me a light-fingered crook, didn't you?" demanded Dowley hotly.

"I spoke of your performance as a light-fingered trick."

"That's the same thing," raged the older man.

"Is it?"

"Don't play baby, and don't crawfish," sneered Dowley, scowling. "You know what you meant."

"And you seem to think you know, too."

"We must break this up," whispered Private Hyman to Noll Terry, Hal Overton's soldier chum. "I don't want to see him get hurt."

"What do you care about Dowley?" asked Noll, shrugging his shoulders.

"Dowley be hanged!" retorted Hyman. "It's your kid friend I'm thinking about."

"Oh, he won't get hurt," retorted Noll with cheery assurance.

"Your friend is pretty handy with his fists, I know, but Dowley is a big fellow, an older man, with more fighting judgment; and I miss my guess if Dowley hasn't had a big lot of practice in rough-and-tumble in all the bad spots of life."

"Will you take back and apologize for what you said?" insisted Dowley.

"If I said anything I shouldn't have said," replied Hal quietly.

"You're a liar, a cur and——"

"Stop that!" objected Hal Overton, yet without raising his voice.

"Apologize, then! Do it handsomely, too."

"You've said too much to be entitled to any apology now," Hal assured the scowling soldier.

"Apologize, or I'll——"

"Going to start now?" Hal queried smilingly.

"Yes, you——"

Dowley made a rush, with both fists clenched. Hal nimbly sidestepped, putting up his own guard at the same time.

"Attention!" shouted a soldier.

Instantly both prospective combatants dropped their hands. The door of the squad room had opened, and now there entered a young officer, handsome and resplendent in his new fatigue uniform. Unlike the khaki-clad enlisted men, this officer was attired in the blue uniform. Down the outer side of either leg of his trousers ran the broad white stripe of the commissioned officer of infantry. On his shoulders lay the plain shoulder strap, without bars or other device, proclaiming the young man to

be a second lieutenant. He was a handsome young fellow of twenty-two, erect, fine of bearing and every inch of him an intense soldier.

"Where is Sergeant Hupner?" asked Lieutenant Prescott. His glance, as he made the inquiry, appeared to be directed to Private Hal Overton.

"I don't know, sir," Hal answered respectfully.

"And neither of the corporals berthed in this squad room are present, either?"

"No, sir."

No displeasure was apparent in the young lieutenant's tone. There was no reason why the corporals, as well as the sergeant, should not be absent at this moment, if they chose. The officer's query was made only for the purpose of securing information.

"You are Private Overton?"

"Yes, sir."

"When Sergeant Hupner returns be good enough to say to him that I wish to see him at my quarters. Any time before the call for parade will do."

"Very good, sir."

"If Private Overton is not here when Sergeant Hupner returns, any other man may deliver my message," continued Lieutenant Prescott. "That is all. Good afternoon, men."

The young lieutenant turned and strode from the squad room.

"Somehow," mused Private Hyman, "it takes West Point to turn out a real soldier, doesn't it? No matter how good a man is, or how long he spends in learning the soldier trade, he's never quite the same unless he has the West Point brand on him."

"That's nothing to do with my affair," growled Private Dowley. "Now, Kid Overton, I'll attend to your case."

"Oh, cut it, Dowley," grumbled Private Hyman. "Get out and keep out, or we'll find a blanket and give you a little excitement. Eh, boys?"

"I'm going to polish off this kid for his insults to me," insisted Dowley sulkily.

"Bring the blanket, boys," muttered Hyman wearily.

From several of the men came a gleeful whoop as they started in various directions. It looked like business of a different sort now, and Dowley was not too blind to see it.

"Oh, all right, if you're all going to butt in to save this kid doughbaby from his just deserts. But he'll get his later on," snarled Private Dowley.

"I'm all ready now. There's no time like the present," smiled Hal.

But two of the soldiers were coming back with blankets. There's not an atom of fun—for the victim—in being tossed in a blanket, so Dowley started for the door.

It banged behind him. Two minutes later it banged again, this time closing on big Private Bill Hooper.

"Birds of a feather—you all know the rest," chuckled Private Hyman, winking at some of his comrades in B Company. A general laugh answered.

"Why didn't you let Dowley have his fun?" asked Private Hal Overton good-humoredly.

"Because, Hal," replied Hyman, "Dowley is a big, ugly, dangerous man. You're spunky; you're all grit, and I don't know any kid who can handle himself as well as you do. But Dowley is in another class."

* * * * * * * *

"You'll do well, after this, Hal," murmured Noll Terry, when the chums were by themselves at one end of the room, "to keep your eyes open. I shall do the same."

"Why?" Overton wanted to know.

"Well, you've made an enemy of Dowley."

"Perhaps."

"Don't treat it as lightly as that," warned Noll Terry with great earnestness. "Dowley isn't a man to forget even a fancied injury. You

noticed that Bill Hooper went out soon after Dowley, didn't you?"

"Yes; but what of it?"

"Hooper hates you; he has hated you for a long time, and Dowley has just learned to hate you. Now, you may be sure those two birds of a feather will flock together."

"Let 'em," laughed Hal indifferently.

"For what purpose will they flock together?" persisted Noll. "They now have a common interest in making life miserable for you."

"Just for my one remark to Dowley?" smiled Hal.

"I tell you Dowley is the kind of man who takes offense easily, and then can't make himself forget. Look there, quick!"

Noll, who had been half facing one of the end windows of the squad room, suddenly nudged Hal, then pointed.

"Do you see that pair over yonder, just going through under the trees?" queried Noll Terry dryly.

"Hooper and Dowley," nodded Hal.

"What do you suppose has brought that pair together so quickly after the scene here? They're drawn together by a common interest —in you."

"Let 'em talk about me, if they like," proposed Hal coolly.

"Do you imagine they're getting together just to talk about you?" demanded Private Terry half indignantly. "Wake up, Hal; keep your eyes open, and I'll do the same. They're two, but we are two, also. If you don't go to sleep, Hal, I think we can prove ourselves equal to anything that that pair may try to do. But you don't want to forget that they are certainly plotting to do something to get you into trouble. Whatever gets you into trouble also puts a bad mark on your record as a soldier and threatens to interfere with your promotion."

"If Hooper and Dowley get busy along those lines," muttered Hal, his eyes blazing, "they'll find that they have a sure fight on their hands."

"That's the way to talk, old fellow," approved Noll Terry, his eyes shining eagerly. "And don't think I'm foolish, either, in the warning that I'm giving you."

"Thank you, Noll; I guess it will be as well to be ordinarily alert, where that pair are concerned. It never does any fellow harm to have his eyes open at all times."

Readers of the previous volume in this series, "Uncle Sam's Boys in the Ranks," will need no introduction to Privates Hal Overton and Noll Terry, of the Thirty-fourth United States Infantry, stationed at Fort Clowdry, in the lower Rockies of Colorado.

Hal and Noll were bright, typical American boys when, at the age of eighteen, back in their New Jersey home town, they decided that their careers in life were to be found through enlisting in the Army.

It was in April that they enlisted, after which they were sent to a recruit rendezvous near New York City. At the recruit rendezvous the two young "rookies," as recruits are commonly termed in the service, were whipped very thoroughly into shape.

While at the recruit rendezvous the two rookies distinguished themselves by preventing the desertion of a corporal who was in arrest. For this service they were commended in orders.

On the way to their regiment in Colorado the boys were present when an attempt was made to hold up the United States mail train. An Army officer, Major Davis, of the Seventeenth Cavalry, ordered them to assist him in resisting an attack on the mail car. In the encounter that followed some of the train robbers were shot, others then surrendering to Major Davis. That same night Major Davis wired the colonel of the Thirty-fourth, speaking of the young recruits in high terms for their prompt obedience and their grit under trying circumstances. So Overton and Terry, on joining their regiment the next morning, found themselves in high favor.

Of course the young soldiers had to endure the usual amount of "hazing" when they took up their new life in the squad room. But this they did with a combination of grit and good humor that soon won them the respect of the older soldiers.

Then came a period of great excitement on the post. Despite the fact that an entire battalion of the Thirty-fourth was stationed at Fort Clowdry, a gang of burglars visited the quarters of married officers on dark nights, and invariably succeeded in getting away with substantial booty.

It was young Private Overton who, when on sentry duty up in officers' row, was first to detect the burglars as they were leaving a house that they had robbed. Before the guard arrived Private Hal Overton had a spirited battle with the decamping thieves. One of them turned out to be Tip Branders, a young bully who had once lived in the home town of Hal and Noll. Branders had robbed his own mother and had drifted west, falling in with bad company. Hal and Noll then remembered a rock-strewn, distant part of the post where they had once met Tip, and there they led a squad of soldiers, under an officer. Here, after another brief but spirited battle, the escaped burglars had been caught; and here also all the booty stolen from the quarters along officers' row was recovered.

Both young soldiers had now received great credit for their daring and clever work. Moreover, both had gone on rapidly in the thorough learning of their new work as soldiers of the regular Army.

And now the month of August had come around. Both young soldiers were now on the high road to efficiency and success in their strenuous new life.

Readers of the "High School Boys' Series" and the "West Point Series" will be quick to recognize another young man who has been briefly introduced in the opening of this present volume—Lieutenant Dick Prescott, a graduate of the United States Military Academy at West Point, and just recently appointed to his regiment, the Thirty-fourth. With Lieutenant Prescott was Lieutenant Greg Holmes, who will be remembered as Prescott's close chum in the High School and West Point days.

Prescott we now find as second lieutenant of B Company; Holmes was now second lieutenant of C Company of the same battalion of the Thirty-fourth.

Both were splendid young officers, and manly to the core. In the few days that Lieutenants Prescott and Holmes had been at Fort Clowdry they had made a fine impression on the enlisted

men. Soldiers are quick to judge and estimate the worth of their officers.

Sergeant Hupner soon entered the squad room. The first sergeant being absent for a couple of days, Hupner was acting first sergeant. To him Hal gave Lieutenant Prescott's message.

"I'll go up to the lieutenant's quarters at once," nodded Hupner. "He's a fine young officer, isn't he?"

"Yes," agreed Private Overton. "But I haven't yet met any but mighty fine officers in the service, so the lieutenant isn't any cause of surprise to me."

Hupner was back within twenty minutes.

"Attention," he called. "Men, in the absence of the captain and first lieutenant until Wednesday, Lieutenant Prescott is company commander. He has just notified me, as acting first sergeant, to inform the men that B and C Companies march from the post on Friday for a two weeks' period of training in field duty. Every man will promptly see to it that all his field outfit is in proper order. Any man wishing further instruction or advice will apply to me at any time up to our departure."

Then Sergeant Hupner hurried forth to acquaint the men in the other squad rooms of B Company with the news.

"Field work? Hurrah!" shouted Private

Terry, always eager to experience new phases of the soldier's life.

"You've never been off on field work, have you?" asked Hyman dryly.

"No; that's why I'm so pleased about it," Noll answered.

"And that's the only reason," added Hyman. "Take it from me that it's a period of hard work, tedious marching, blistered feet, aching muscles and all but crumbling bones. It's nothing but a big, torturesome hike through the mountains."

"I'll enjoy it," insisted Private Terry.

"Wait," advised Hyman.

Soon after the buglers of the post were sounding first call to afternoon parade. It was not until the men were falling in ranks that Bill Hooper and the morose Dowley heard about the coming tour of field duty.

"That will be our chance," muttered Hooper to Dowley, after the men had been dismissed at the conclusion of parade. The two were again by themselves, their scheming heads together.

"I don't believe the chance will be as good off in the field as it will be here at barracks," grunted Dowley.

"That's because you haven't been in the Army long enough to know," retorted big Bill Hooper.

"Blast the Army!" snarled Dowley.

"However did you come to enlist, anyway?" asked Hooper curiously.

"I had reasons of my own," replied Dowley shortly.

"Did the sheriff have anything to do with those reasons?" grinned Hooper darkly.

"Don't get too curious!" warned the other.

"Oh, I'm not nosey," laughed Hooper. "And we can't afford to quarrel. We're both pledged to getting Overton kicked out of the service."

"Are you sure that he and Terry really expect to work their way up to becoming commissioned officers?"

"I have it on the best of authority," declared Private Hooper.

"Whose?"

"Their own."

"Did they tell you so?"

"Not they! Those kids are too close-mouthed for that. At least, they didn't tell me direct, and I don't believe they've told any other enlisted men on the post. But I heard them talking it over, one day when they didn't know I was around. They expect to be made corporals before their first year is out. In three years they hope to be sergeants, and then they scheme to take the enlisted men's examination for commissions as second lieutenants."

"Lieutenants? Shave-tails?" guffawed Dow-

ley. "Hooper, they'll never even be corporals. It's a bob-tail discharge for theirs!"

Second lieutenants, when their commissions are very new, are often referred to as "shave-tails." A "bob-tail" is a dishonorable discharge, after court-martial. To a real soldier a "bob-tail" means unspeakable disgrace.

"A bob-tail for theirs—yes, sir," repeated Private Dowley. "And I'm genius enough to bring it about!"

"Perhaps you won't need my help, for you sure are some smart," suggested Bill Hooper in a tone of pretended admiration.

"I'm smart enough to see that you'd drop out and use me as the catspaw," growled Private Dowley. "None of that, Bill! You'll stand right by and do half of the dirty work in exchange for half of the satisfaction. Between us we'll give that fool Overton a new middle name, and that middle name will be 'Bob-tail'!"

CHAPTER II

ON THE GREAT SUMMER HIKE

FROM up the mountain road one of a little group of officers ahead sent back an informal signal.

"B Company fall in!" called out Lieutenant Dick Prescott.

"C Company fall in!" followed Lieutenant Greg Holmes.

These two young West Pointers had been left temporarily in command of the companies with which they served.

Some hundred and eighty men rose from their by no means soft seats on the ground along the trail and fell into single file.

Another hand signal came down the trail.

"B Company forward, route step, march!" commanded Lieutenant Prescott.

"C Company forward, route step, march," echoed Lieutenant Holmes a moment later.

Tortuously the line moved forward once more. To one well up in the air that long line might have looked like a thin serpent trailing its way up the mountain side. But it was a very real, human line.

Each private soldier carried rifle, bayonet,

cartridge belt, intrenching tool, canteen, haversack and blanket roll. It was a heavy pack. In addition, men here and there carried either a pick or a shovel.

Noll was carrying an extra shovel just now. Hal Overton had no such extra pack to-day, but all the day before he had toiled along with a pick added to the rest of his equipment.

What have soldiers to do with a pick and shovel? Theoretically these two companies now engaged on field duty were marching through a hostile country. After a battle the pick and shovel may be used for the work of burying slain comrades. Such tools are also useful in the swift digging of trenches in which to fight.

It was past the middle of the afternoon now, and the day of the week Monday. This little column was winding up the third day of its work in field.

As B Company traveled tediously along, Hal Overton was nineteenth man from the first sergeant. Noll was twentieth; directly behind Terry marched Private Hyman.

"Terry?" called Hyman in a low tone.

"Yes?" returned Noll.

"How do you like field work now?"

"Fine."

"You're a cheerful liar," growled Private Hyman.

"No, I'm not," laughed Noll. "I'm telling the truth."

"You really enjoy this hike?"

"Yes; and so does Hal."

"Huh! He's a bigger liar than you are."

"What's that human calamity behind you howling about?" demanded Private Overton.

"He's intimating that the truth isn't in us because we claim to like field duty."

"Hyman always was a bake-house soldier," laughed Hal cheerily.

"What's that kid saying about me?" demanded Hyman.

"Overton says," reported Noll, not very accurately, "that he can't understand why you're in the Army at all. He says that one of your temperament could find a job in civil life that would suit you much better."

"What job is that?" asked Hyman.

"Nurse girl," grinned Terry.

"For that," threatened Hyman, "I'll put salt in that kid's coffee to-night."

The conversation was carried on in a low tone of course. Troops in the field, marching at route step, are allowed to carry on quiet conversations when not supposed to be near the enemy.

"You want to look out for Hyman, Hal," Noll passed word forward.

"Why?"

"He says you stole his bacon from his haversack this morning and he's going to set a steel trap in his haversack to-night."

"Hyman doesn't know the truth when he halts it on sentry post," Overton retorted. "Hyman hasn't had any bacon in his haversack since we started from Fort Clowdry."

"How do you know?" demanded Private Hyman, who happened to overhear this statement.

"Because I've gotten up every night and looked through your haversack for bacon," declared Private Overton unblushingly.

"I heard to-day why you joined the Army," grunted Hyman.

"Yes?" grinned Hal.

"Sure! You had some trouble with the sheriff at home over stealing the flowers from the cemetery and selling them to get cigarette money. You're a nice one, Overton, to be entrusted with government property!"

"Oh, come, now, Hyman," Hal laughed back. "That wasn't so bad as your case. You enlisted because the judge said you'd either have to go to jail for robbing the Salvation Army's Christmas boxes, or else turn soldier."

Half a dozen men in the long line were laughing now.

"I'll fix you for that when you're asleep to-night," growled Hyman.

"Yes; I notice you never do anything to a fellow when he's awake," jeered Private Hal.

The two men were not on bad terms, nor in any danger of becoming so. This was merely an instance of the way soldiers "josh" one another.

The sun was now disappearing behind the western hill tops. It would be daylight, however, for more than two hours to come.

Fifty minutes after this last start Lieutenant Prescott again received a hand signal from the officers on ahead.

"B Company halt; fall out," ordered the young West Pointer.

Holmes repeated the command to C Company.

The head of the line had halted near a grove through which a brook bubbled along on its way to the stream down in the canyon to the right of the trail.

"The officers are going to inspect the grove as a site for camp," was the word that passed back along the line.

"A soldier's first duty," quoth Hal, as he sank upon the ground, "is to make himself as comfortable as he can."

Noll, too, dropped to the ground, and Hyman followed the example.

"Overton, I'll have to borrow some of that baby powder of yours to-night," sighed Hyman.

"For your complexion?" grinned Hal.

"No; to put in my shoes. This mountain hike has my feet in bad."

"I'll tell you what you ought to do, just before every big hike," laughed Hal.

"Don't tell me anything about the hospital," murmured Hyman disgustedly. "I tried that, day before we left Fort Clowdry, but the rainmaker warned me that if I tried to make hospital report, he'd see to it that I was left on thin gruel diet for a month."

"The rainmaker knew his business," mocked Hal. "And I've heard another yarn about that rainmaker."

"What?"

"After a malingerer gets his thin gruel down the rainmaker gives him a stiff dose of syrup of ipecac, and the gruel comes up again."

"There's no show for a man in the Army nowadays," sighed Hyman, who, with all his pretense at "kicking," was a keen soldier and dependable man.

In every regiment are some soldiers who would shirk every arduous duty if it were possible. The favorite device, with such men, is to turn malingerer—that is, to pretend illness and gain admission to hospital, which means a solid rest

while comrades are working hard. But the successes of malingerers in the way of shirking have made Army surgeons keener, also. Lucky is the suspected malingerer who doesn't get put on thin diet and fed nauseating medicines.

From the group of officers ahead on the trail came Captain Freeman and First Lieutenant Ray of C Company.

"Mr. Holmes," called Captain Freeman, "let C Company fall in and take up the march again."

Young Lieutenant Holmes instantly gave the order to fall in. A moment later C Company moved off at the route step.

"What does that mean?" Hal asked Hyman.

"Oh, some new scheme that the officers have hatched up," replied Hyman. "There'll probably be a sham engagement on between C and our company to-morrow."

"We're lucky if it doesn't take place in the night," grunted another soldier.

"Well, my man, suppose it does?" demanded Sergeant Hupner, appearing behind the "kicker." "What do you suppose these manœuvres are for? They're to teach you the soldier's trade. They're to fit you so that, in actual war, you'll know what to do under any given conditions. The better you know your trade, in war, the better chances you have to

come out of the war alive. This field duty, which so many of you dislike, is for the training of every officer and man in the very things he does in war time. The better every officer and man understands them the better is each fellow's chance of keeping alive in war time. Those of you who grumble ought to be ashamed of yourselves. Look around you at some of the older soldiers who've seen service, and you'll find they never kick."

"B Company fall in!" rang the order, this time from Captain Cortland.

But the march was to be a short one. The command was led into the grove and halted. The order to pitch camp was given. Now a lively scene followed.

As the outer covering of his blanket roll each soldier carries a flap of canvas, which constitutes one half of a shelter tent, as it is officially termed. The soldier's name for it is dog tent or pup house. Each man also carries two jointed sticks. One pair of sticks is jointed to form the front pole of the tent, the other the rear pole. In front of the tent site a peg is driven, and a cord passed from this peg up over the front pole, across to the rear pole, and down to a peg at the rear. Now the two flaps of canvas are fitted over this frame and the tent is up.

"Let's beat the company to it, Noll?"

breathed Hal in his bunkie's ear. In the Army the "bunkie" is the man with whom the tent is shared. Usually two bunkies become close chums, even if they were not before joining the service.

"We've done it," breathed Hal, as he and Nell straightened up and gazed about them. "That takes the crimp out of a few veterans."

"Get a hike on, some of you men!" called First Sergeant Gray briskly. Then he turned to glare mildly at Hooper and Dowley, who were finishing last.

Corporal Cotter, his own tent up with Corporal Reynolds, turned to look down the company street.

"Hooper, you and Dowley are going to hear something," predicted the corporal dryly.

"That's done well enough," grumbled Dowley, glancing at his tent.

Captain Cortland stood at the head of the company street glancing down.

"One tent forward out of alignment," called the company commander, then stepped down the street. "Who are the men that occupy this tent?" he demanded, halting.

"My tent, sir," mumbled Hooper.

"And mine, sir," added Dowley.

"Don't you men know how to erect a tent in alignment with the street front?" inquired Cap-

tain Cortland. "Take it down. Corporal Cotter, stand by to see that these men set up their tent in soldierly fashion."

"I told you you'd hear something," remarked Cotter.

"Aw, what's the use of being so finicky about a tent a quarter of an inch out of alignment?" grumbled Hooper.

"The tent is more than that out of alignment," returned the corporal. "And there's every use in the world in performing every duty in the most soldierly fashion."

"Say," began Dowley argumentatively.

"Silence, and get on with your work," ordered Corporal Cotter sharply. "Hooper, you're close to thirty-five years old. Dowley, you're around thirty. Yet those two kids, Overton and Terry, are only eighteen, and they beat you at every point in soldierliness."

"Soldiering is a kid's game," growled Dowley.

"The best men we get in the Army are those we catch young," retorted Corporal Cotter. "Stop! Tighten that cord a whole lot more."

"How does that suit you, Corp?" demanded Dowley when, at last, the sulky bunkies had again finished their task.

"Address me as Corporal, not Corp," returned Cotter stiffly.

"Well, Corporal, how do you like the set of our tent now?" insisted Private Dowley.

"It looks better this time," assented the corporal. "But, after this, you men, instead of sneering at the kids of the company, will do well to show yourselves as good men."

"We're always getting the kids rubbed into us," growled Hooper.

"Because they're head and shoulders over you both as soldiers," rejoined Corporal Cotter, turning on his heel. "Even William Green is a lot ahead of you as a soldier."

As Dowley turned to glance scowlingly up the street he caught the glance of Captain Cortland, glancing once more down the street.

"Your tent is in proper alignment this time, men," nodded the company commander, and went away.

Now the creaking of heavy wagons was heard along the trail, accompanied by the loud voices of the drivers. The expedition was accompanied by six heavy wagons, each drawn by four mules.

"Water in the brook; wood two hundred yards southeast!" shouted Lieutenant Prescott, who had been sent scouting for these necessities. On pitching camp the first task is always to learn where wood and the best drinking water can be found in the neighborhood. Often the water close at hand is forbidden for cooking and

drinking purposes in favor of clear water at a distance.

Three of the approaching wagons continued along the trail, while the other three turned in at the side of the grove.

Corporal Reynolds and four men were detailed to unload and put up the eight-by-ten khaki-colored tent that was to be occupied by the three company officers.

"I notice that the wide stripes don't care about sleeping in pup-houses," grumbled Hooper to his bunkie.

"Wide-stripe" is the nick-name sometimes given an officer on account of the fact that the side stripe down the trousers' leg of the blue uniform is much broader than that worn by the non-commissioned officer. Privates wear no stripes on the trousers' leg, with the exception of musicians, who wear two very narrow parallel stripes.

Soon after the erection of the little village of tents, the soldiers scattered, though they soon returned with bundles of fire wood.

"You had better go and chase the stuff for our fire, Bill," proposed Dowley.

"Chase it yourself," retorted Hooper.

"Not this trip," retorted Dowley. "It's up to you this time."

Hooper swore that he wouldn't, but it ended

by his starting tardily after fagots. Dowley was already gaining the ascendancy over Private Bill and making a half servant of him.

Presently some forty fires were blazing brightly in an irregular line at a distance of some yards from the line of dog-tents. American soldiers were preparing their evening meal in the field. The operation was an extremely simple one. First, each soldier dropped a handful of coffee beans into his agate drinking cup. With the butt of the bayonet he crushed these beans, the fineness depending upon his skill. Then from the canteen each man poured water enough nearly to fill the cup, which was then set on the fire for boiling.

By the time that the coffee had boiled for a few minutes each soldier returned his cup to the ground beside him. A dash of cold water from his canteen was sufficient to "settle" the coffee.

Now, each man placed two or three strips of bacon in his frying pan and laid it on the coals. While these morsels were sizzling the soldier turned his attention to sweetening his coffee. Then, when the bacon was cooked to his satisfaction, each man brought out his field hard tack, munching alternately on biscuit and meat.

"Yesterday was Sunday, and we had raised biscuits, roast beef and potatoes, with real

gravy," grunted Dowley. "If a stingy government would give us more wagons we could have that every day."

"In war time," broke in Sergeant Hupner, "you might feel lucky if you saw the Army oven working once in a month. I've been there, and I've had to live for weeks on bacon, hard tack and coffee. Sometimes we didn't have the coffee or the bacon, either."

"That's a dog's life," grumbled Dowley.

"No; it's a man's life, at need, but only a man can stand it in the field," returned the sergeant gravely.

After supper many of the men smoked, but Hal and Noll, as they did not indulge in the weed, strolled down toward the trail.

"Isn't this great?" breathed Hal Overton, staring off over the distant mountain tops. "The field duty, I mean."

"It's great, and I wouldn't have missed it for anything," agreed Noll. "But it would do no good to try to tell anything of the sort to fellows like Hooper and Dowley."

"They're bad eggs," muttered Hal. "I wonder how such men ever got past with their references and managed to be accepted for the service."

"It is queer," nodded Noll. "But neither will stay in the service beyond the first enlistment."

"Yet they conduct themselves just well enough to escape any real censure from the company officers."

First Sergeant Gray was now moving through the camp, notifying the men who were chosen for guard duty that night. But neither Hal nor Noll were warned for detail that night.

Not long after dark tattoo was sounded by one of the buglers. Fifteen minutes later taps sounded, and all but the guard turned in in their dog-tents.

Each soldier is provided with a warm blanket and a rubber poncho, which is a blanket with a slit in the middle so that the head may be thrust through and the poncho worn, at need, as a rain coat. But to-night Noll Terry spread his poncho on the ground, Hal laying his a-top. Then both young soldiers lay down, drawing up their combined stock of blankets over them, for the early night had turned out chilly.

"Rest enough, now, for to-morrow's hike," mumbled Hal drowsily.

"Yes; unless we're turned out to meet a night surprise," returned Noll dryly.

In another part of the camp Hooper and Dowley, both warned for the guard, but not yet on post, were whispering by themselves.

"To-morrow Kid Overton begins to get his," chuckled Hooper.

"Yes; he'll begin to see those corporal's chevrons fading in the distance."

"We ought to fix Terry with him."

"One at a time; that'll be surer," scowled Private Dowley.

Hal and Noll slept the night through. Hal dreamed he was chasing an elusive rascal, who performed wretchedly on the cornet. As the rascal fled he continued to play on the cornet.

Then young Private Overton opened his eyes. The cornet player turned out to be the bugler, who was blowing lustily, twice through, the first call to reveille. Hal sprang up from his blankets. After he had crawled out of the pup-house, Noll joined him.

Wood and water were quickly brought. The field breakfast was like the field supper of the night before. Then the bugler got busy without delay. The men fell in and roll-call was read. Immediately Captain Cortland's crisp voice gave the orders that opened up the ranks. An unexpected inspection was on.

Lieutenant Hampton stepped before the first platoon, Lieutenant Prescott before the second. Inspection of pieces was on.

Hal and Noll stood in the second platoon, about half way down the line.

Noll held his piece at port arms as soon as Lieutenant Prescott reached the man before him.

By the time that the young West Pointer halted before Noll, Hal, as the next man, threw his rifle over to port arms.

The inspection of Noll's rifle proved satisfactory. Then the lieutenant halted before Overton.

"Open your magazine," commanded Lieutenant Prescott.

Hal obeyed.

"Draw your bolt."

Hal did so, after a hard tug, holding the bolt in his hand.

"Let me look at that bolt," ordered Prescott, gazing at the piece of steel mechanism in astonishment. He took it from the young soldier's hand and looked thunderstruck.

"Don't replace your bolt until ordered, Private Overton. Fall out to the rear."

Overwhelmed with amazement, his face flushing hotly with shame, Private Hal Overton gave his officer the rifle salute, then obeyed.

Noll Terry's face went white with anxiety over his bunkie's misfortune.

When inspection had been completed, Lieutenant Prescott made his report to Captain Cortland, who immediately followed his young second lieutenant to where Hal stood.

"What's this, Overton?" asked the captain coldly. "I thought you were one of our model

young soldiers. Why, your rifle-bolt must have been in the fire. The end is out of shape, the temper is drawn—and here are file-marks on the bolt. It's unserviceable. I don't believe you could fire the piece."

"I'm afraid not, sir," Hal admitted.

"Load with a blank cartridge, my man, and try to fire the piece."

Returning the bolt, Hal slipped in a blank. But he could not drive the bolt home for firing.

"Ruined, my man," commented the captain stiffly. "Overton, this piece has been in your care. How did this happen?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Corporal Cotter!"

The corporal came over briskly.

"Corporal, Private Overton is in arrest until released. You will march him as a prisoner at the rear of the company and turn him over to the guard at night."

Corporal Cotter again saluted. Then, as the company officer and the young lieutenant started away, Cotter stationed himself beside Overton.

"Put your bolt back in the piece as far as it will go," ordered Cotter. "Tie it in place."

The men in ranks ahead had heard enough to realize that Private Hal Overton was in disgrace, and most of them were sorry.

Noll Terry was more than sorry.

CHAPTER III

SOLDIER HAL MARCHES AS A PRISONER

THE company broke ranks under orders to strike camp at once.

Within six minutes the camp was down. Every enlisted man had his blanket roll made up and in place, and all his other equipment on.

Corporal Cotter stood over Hal even while he was making up his roll.

"How on earth did that thing happen?" murmured Noll wretchedly.

"Silence; no talking with the prisoner," rebuked Corporal Cotter crisply.

So Noll held his peace, though he was "boiling" inside.

Again the company was assembled.

"Fours right, march! By file, march!"

B Company again struck the trail, heading further up into the mountains, leaving the wagons to follow presently. Though B Company was now likely to be attacked at any time in sham battle, by C Company, it had been agreed that the respective wagon trains of the companies were to be immune from capture on this day.

"Overton, keep a distance of ten paces from the rear man of the company, and march before me," commanded Cotter. "Keep the step carefully until the order for route step comes."

Never in his life had Hal Overton felt as heart-sick as he did now.

Marching to the rear, a prisoner!

It was, in every sense, as bad as being in the guard-house.

Up ahead in the line things were "doing," but to this Hal, in his new misery, was all but blind.

Sergeant Hupner, with six men, had been sent ahead as a "point" to discover any possible enemy who might be lurking in the way of the forward progress of B Company.

Scouts had been sent out on either flank. The line moved slowly, as though fearing the presence of an actual enemy. There were frequent halts. At one time, while the line waited, Lieutenant Prescott took a detachment of twelve men to explore the country ahead. When he returned, reporting no enemy developed, B Company moved forward, though never without point and flankers.

At noon B Company, still having stirred up no enemy, halted for dinner.

Captain Cortland and his two young officers got through their meal with soldierly despatch.

Then the company commander called to Sergeant Gray, who reported, saluting.

"Sergeant, direct Corporal Cotter to bring his prisoner here."

Seated on a small boulder, the captain eyed young Overton keenly as the latter was brought up.

"Private Overton," began Cortland, "have you yet discovered, or really suspected, how your rifle bolt came to be in such bad shape?"

"No, sir," replied Hal, again saluting.

"At first glance it looked like a case of sheer neglect on your part to care for your piece."

"Yes, sir."

"But those file marks?"

"I can't explain them, sir."

"It is forbidden for any man to use a file on the parts of his rifle, except by direct permission from one of the company officers."

"I know it, sir."

"Have you had any such permission?"

"No, sir."

"Have you a file?"

"Not a real one, sir. Only a manicure file."

"Let me see it."

Hal turned over the file, after finding it in his haversack.

"Now, let me have the bolt from your rifle."

Captain Cortland tried the file lightly in some

of the nicks in the bolt. Then he passed file and bolt over to Lieutenant Hampton.

"Mr. Hampton, don't these nicks seem to fit this file remarkably well?" queried the company commander.

"They appear to—very well, sir," replied Lieutenant Hampton, testing the file in the nicks.

"What do you say, Mr. Prescott?"

The young second lieutenant studied file and bolt attentively.

"I am obliged to agree, Captain, with yourself and Mr. Hampton."

"Private Overton, think again. Do you still care to deny that you employed the file on the bolt of your rifle?"

"I deny it, sir, with all the emphasis of which I am capable," was Hal's earnest retort. His face was flushed, his breath came quickly, but he looked straight and honestly into his commander's eyes. There was no cringing in his attitude. His high color was to be attributed only to the humiliation of the position in which he found himself.

"And this bolt has been in the fire," continued Captain Cortland. "Just such a fire, let us say, as you build three times a day for the preparation of your food. The temper of the end of the bolt is ruined."

"Yes, sir. May I speak, Captain?"

"Go on, Overton."

"Captain Cortland, I am aware how badly this looks for me. But I assure you, sir, on my honor as a soldier, that I have no guilty or other knowledge of how the bolt came to be in this fearful condition. I am entirely innocent, sir, of any act that could have put the bolt in such condition."

"You are not guilty even of negligence, Overton?"

"Not of any intentional negligence, sir."

"Then, Overton, you must have some sort of suspicion of how this thing happened."

"I have a suspicion, Captain, but it is not founded on anything that is yet very tangible, sir."

"You think it an enemy's work?"

"Yes, sir. None but an enemy could do such a thing as this to a comrade's rifle."

"Granted, but who is the enemy?"

"May I be excused, sir, from answering?" asked Private Overton very respectfully.

"Why?"

"Because it is quite possible that, in naming an enemy, I may do some honest soldier an injury."

"You need not answer, then, Overton. Wait here."

Captain Cortland stepped down from the small

boulder on which he had been seated. At a sign from him Lieutenant Hampton walked away with the company commander. The two remained for some moments in low conversation.

"Overton!" summoned Captain Cortland, returning.

Hal saluted.

"This affair looks badly for you, and I want it to be a lesson to you hereafter. You have had an excellent record, Overton, since you joined the regiment. For this time I am going to take your word that you are ignorant of how the accident to your rifle bolt happened. So you are now released from arrest, and will rejoin your company. If you suspect that any comrade is guilty of this outrage on your bolt, I recommend that you keep your eyes open for any further attempts against your record. Corporal Cotter, you will not repeat what has been said here. Overton, you are released from arrest. Corporal, report yourself to the first sergeant as being on regular duty again."

Corporal and private saluted, then turned back to the company.

"You got off easily," murmured Noll, when his bunkie, with face white and eyes flashing, joined him.

"That's because Captain Cortland decided to

take my word for my innocence in the matter," Hal replied cautiously.

"Now, see here, old fellow, you've got to be up and doing," urged Noll earnestly in a whisper.

"What can I do, now?" Hal asked.

"Keep your eyes peeled. You can find out, by and by, who was responsible for that low trick. Hal, you'll have to make vengeance your watchword."

"Revenge is sweet," mimicked Hal dryly.

"It surely is—sometimes."

"But sweet things make one sick at his stomach," Hal uttered dryly.

"Well, if you're going to stand for having a job like that put over on you," uttered Noll disgustedly, "I'm not! The fellow who did that trick to you isn't fit to be in the service, and I'm going to get him out of it, whether you help or not."

Separated from the young soldiers by only a thin ledge of rock, eavesdropping Hooper and Dowley heard, and gazed keenly at each other.

"We've got to frame things up for young Terry, too, then!" whispered Bill Hooper, as the sulky pair stole away.

CHAPTER IV

THE JOKING SCOUT

"CAN you see the enemy, Overton?"

"I can't see a thing, Corporal."

"Move forward cautiously. Don't make a sound. If you do you'll betray our position."

"How far shall I go, Corporal?"

"Move ahead until you run into signs of the enemy. Above all, bear in mind that you mustn't betray our presence to the enemy."

Private Hal Overton gripped his rifle tightly in the darkness as he all but wriggled forward over the ground.

It was all very real business to the soldiers engaged in this mimic warfare. If nothing more serious happened, any big mistake on the part of a soldier in this sham warfare would bring upon him the displeasure of his officers.

Late that same afternoon B Company had been attacked by lurking C Company. Some very clever manœuvring of the men under cover had been done, and a good deal of blank ammunition had been fired. True, there had been no real casualties, but, under the rules of the game, B Company had made such a spirited and

excellent defense that C Company had been driven further back.

Now the position of C Company was unknown, but the "enemy" was believed to be lurking in the vicinity, bent upon a night surprise.

Two thirds of B Company slept back in the camp of pup-houses. The other third, under command of Lieutenant Prescott, was divided up among sentries, outposts and scouts.

To Corporal Cotter had been entrusted the problem of taking a scouting party consisting of three privates and trying to locate either the enemy's outpost or the main body.

Just a moment before Hal's orders to prowl forward a sound had been heard, evidently about four hundred yards ahead.

So now Hal stole forward, moving as softly as any cat could have done, this despite the fact that his advance must be over jagged rocks here and there.

The ground was ideal for ambush fighting.

Hal now had a new rifle, that had been issued to him when the wagons of B Company came up late that night. The damaged piece was now in the wagon, and Hal bore a rifle on whose efficient action he could depend.

"It's almost a mockery to have a gun, though, just now," Hal smiled grimly as he lifted the piece over a ledge of rock and followed.

"Wouldn't I get a clever roasting from Captain Cortland if I dared to fire it while scouting."

Now Private Overton came to an open space where he could walk more easily. He did not hasten, however, for there was no telling when, in the darkness, he might step on a stone and send it rolling, with a resulting racket that would warn the enemy, if any of them were within hearing.

Every step had to be taken as though the troops were in the midst of life and death war. The rules of the game were strict, and any bit of bad judgment was likely to count against the score of the company to which the man belonged.

Every now and then the sham young scout halted, peering backward, for it was going to be of prime importance to him to know how to get back when his scouting trip was done.

"Halt! Who's there?"

Overton did halt, flattening himself down against the rock.

The hail, though softly spoken, had been unmistakable.

"Halt! Who's there?"

"You'll have to come here and find out," thought Overton.

Then, as silence followed, Hal, holding his very breath, crawled some ten yards to the left.

Again he halted, but this time there was no faintly spoken challenge.

"I think I know where that fellow is," mused Hal. "Is he a lone sentry, or part of an outpost?"

It required fifteen minutes now of the most cautious procedure, but Private Overton at last found himself hugging the ground at a point from which he could just barely discern the dimly defined figure of an alert sentry against the skyline.

"I've got him between our camp and myself now," thought Hal swiftly. "Now I've got to be doubly careful. I don't care to have B Company laughing at me because I got captured while on scouting duty. But I'll settle the question of whether that sentry is alone, or part of an outpost."

Three minutes later, after some most careful manœuvring, Overton had solved the question. His grinning face was turned toward a corporal and two men who lay rolled in their blankets some ten yards behind the sentry.

"It's an outpost, all right," grinned Hal. "Whee! How I would like to bag the outpost and take them in as prisoners."

But that was out of the question—not to be thought of.

Private Hal Overton found himself seized by

a spirit of mischief. It was the same type of impulse which, carried to the point of reckless daring in real warfare, leads men on to swift promotion.

Almost before he realized what he was doing Hal had hidden his own rifle and was crawling stealthily toward the sleeping men.

Beside the corporal lay his rifle. Barely breathing, his body flattened against the ground, Hal crept closer and closer, then stealthily withdrew the rifle.

A moment or two later Hal had the captured rifle lying on the ground beside his own.

"That's a real find to take back to camp," laughed Hal silently.

He was about to make off with the captured piece when a new impulse seized him.

"Why not go back after more loot?" he asked himself, grinning. "Jupiter, I'll do it!"

Every such move as this was fraught with added danger. But Hal moved on his stomach, taking plenty of time, always with his watchful eyes on the dim figure of the sentry a few yards away. That soldier, however, appeared to be peering mostly in the direction where he believed the camp of B Company to lie.

After a short time Hal, back in safety again, gloated over the sight of three rifles beside his own.

"I'll be a hog, if I don't look out!" chuckled the young scout of sham warfare.

Yet, though this was no life and death fighting, Private Overton had nevertheless a good deal at stake. It would result in his being set down as a rather stupid soldier should he be captured by the enemy's outpost while on scouting duty.

"I can't help it. I've got to have one more try, anyway," decided the mischievous soldier boy.

So back he crept. An instant later he tried to make himself flatter against the earth than he had been able yet to do.

For that sentry had now turned and was looking in his direction.

"I commit myself to the darkness," gasped Private Overton inwardly.

For, if his presence were detected, the sentry, with one call, could bring the other three sleeping men to their feet. Against such odds Hal would have but scant chance of getting away.

"And I'll have to leave my rifle behind if I duck from here," thought Hal, beginning to regret his rashness.

It was one thing to capture the rifles of the outpost; it was quite another thing to leave his own gun behind in their hands.

After a few moments of agony the dimly seen sentry again turned his face in another direction.

"Now that I've started this trick, I'll put it through or die," thought the soldier boy, setting his teeth.

Again he crouched close to the corporal and the two other sleepers. This time there appeared to be no loot loose save a pair of canteens that lay upon the ground. Private Hal Overton made sure of these articles, then, as he lay there, took a last sweeping look.

The shoes of Corporal Raynes, of C Company, protruded under the foot of his blanket.

"I guess it would be too risky a stunt to try to unlace the corporal's shoes and carry 'em away," quivered mischievous Hal, eyeing the footgear longingly.

Then, as he gazed, it struck the soldier boy that there was something odd about the position of the corporal's shoes with regard to the line of Raynes's body.

"I wonder if——" cogitated Private Overton, edging himself forward.

Hal made a cautious try.

His last guess proved to be correct. Corporal Raynes had taken off his shoes to ease his aching feet, and had tucked them in at the bottom of his blanket.

"It's a shabby trick to play on a good fellow," grinned the soldier boy, "but this is war."

For the last time Hal crept back. Now an even greater task confronted him, and that was how to get away with all the outpost loot he had captured.

By making three stealthy trips, Private Overton at last succeeded in getting all the loot in safety to a point more than one hundred yards from the outpost.

"Now, it's time to drop nonsense for real business," decided the young scout.

Ten minutes later he had located the main camp, and that without falling into the hands of either of the two C Company sentries whom he was compelled to pass in the black night.

Then back to the hidden loot the young soldier returned.

"Whew, but that's going to be a pack!" muttered Hal, gazing at it almost ruefully. "However, I've got to take it. I won't leave a blessed thing behind."

The canteens Overton threw over his shoulders, so that he had one on each side, in addition to his own, which hung at his left hip. The corporal's shoes he tied to his belt. It was the bunching of the four service rifles, with their weight of more than forty pounds, that gave

him his real trouble. But at last he had the four pieces lashed together and started.

"I've yet got to look out that I don't run into any scouts of the enemy," thought the soldier boy half ruefully. "Whew, what a break it would be to be picked up with all this loot!"

It was a welcome sound indeed when, at last, the young scout heard, near the spot where he had left his own party, the almost whispered challenge:

"Halt! Who's there?"

"Friend," responded Hal Overton in a tone no louder.

"Halt where you are, friend, until a sentry advances to recognize you," returned cautious Corporal Cotter.

It was the corporal himself who came forward.

"Great Scott, Overton, what have you——"

"It's loot," returned Hal proudly.

"Where on earth did you——"

"From the enemy's outpost. And I located the camp, too. I could guide you right to either outpost or main camp. Will you take these guns, Corporal? My back feels broken."

"I should think it might," was Cotter's grinning response, as he reached out and took the lashed rifles. "Great Scott! What won't the lieutenant and Captain Cortland say!"

Just as they stepped softly back, Private Noll Terry challenged someone approaching softly from the rear.

"Halt! Who's there?"

"Officer of the day," returned Lieutenant Prescott's low voice.

"Advance, officer of the day, to be recognized."

Lieutenant Prescott advanced into the group.

"Do you see all this stuff, Lieutenant?" asked Corporal Cotter, calling attention to Hal's loot as it lay on the ground. "Overton went forward as a scout, and located one of the enemy's outposts, also the main camp. And he brought back these souvenirs of the outpost."

"To whom do the shoes belong?" questioned Lieutenant Prescott after looking at the stuff.

"To Corporal Raynes, sir, in command of the outpost," returned the soldier boy, with a grin.

"How did you get hold of all this stuff, Overton?"

Hal told his story briefly.

"Great Scott! Bombshells and grenades, what a roaring joke on the enemy! Overton, you're a man worth having in B Company. Dark as the night is, your exploit would reflect credit on a trained Indian scout. Overton, I'm going to take you back to camp with me. I'll

wake Captain Cortland to hear your report as to the enemy's position. And the captain will surely want to see this loot of the outpost and to hear your tale of how you got it. Here, let me have a couple of those rifles to carry for you."

Lieutenant Prescott led the way back to B Company's camp. And he shook with laughter all the way.

CHAPTER V

THE CORPORAL WITH THE SHEEPISH GRIN

CAPTAIN CORTLAND heard the young scout's report without losing his gravity, though he decided against trying a night attack on the enemy beyond.

"Overton," he commented, "if you can do things like to-night's work very often there will be no doubt whatever that you have in you the making of a real genius for scouting. I commend you most heartily for this work."

It was only when he went back to his tent to lie down that Captain Cortland gave way to silent laughter.

At daybreak the camp was astir. The men who had been on guard duty and scouting through the night came in, somewhat heavy-eyed, after a relief had been marched out to take their places.

These returned soldiers, as soon as they had breakfasted, threw themselves on the ground, under such shade as they could find, and took an hour of solid sleep.

"The wagon train is approaching, sir," reported Sergeant Gray.

"Then pass the order for the men to report

at the train and draw rations to last until to-morrow night," directed Captain Cortland. "After to-morrow night the two companies will be together again for the balance of the field work."

Lieutenant Prescott was acting as commissary officer for B Company, and he went immediately to the trail. Captain Cortland, stepping into his tent, buckled on his sword and then sauntered down to the wagon train to see that all went smoothly.

As he reached the spot where the soldiers of B Company were drawing their rations, Captain Cortland caught sight of a corporal perched on the seat beside the driver of one of the wagons.

"You here, Corporal Raynes?" demanded Captain Cortland, striving hard to preserve his official gravity.

Grinning sheepishly, Corporal Raynes—in his stocking feet—sprang down into the trail and saluted.

"Yes, sir," he admitted.

"Ill?"

"No, sir."

"Were you captured, then?"

"No, sir," answered Raynes, the sheepish look in his face increasing. "But I'm a non-combatant, sir; ruled out of the manœuvres and ordered to stay with the wagon train, sir."

"How did that happen?" inquired the captain, though he was able to make a very good guess.

"While I was on outpost during the night, sir, my shoes were taken from me. I suspect, sir, that one of your scouts got 'em."

"But we have quartermaster's supplies along. Why didn't you draw a new pair of shoes this morning?"

"No shoes of my size, sir, in the supplies," reported Raynes, once more saluting. "So Captain Freeman told me that I certainly couldn't fight in my stocking feet. Therefore, sir, he ordered me to join the wagon train and respect all the obligations of a non-combatant."

"Too bad, too bad, Corporal, for you are a valuable man," went on Captain Cortland.

"I don't feel like one this morning, sir, after having my shoes taken," grinned the C Company corporal in embarrassment.

"Well, since you've been ordered among the non-combatants," continued Cortland, after turning slightly and espying the grinning face of Private Hal Overton, "I think the scout who captured your shoes may as well return them. But hold on. I see two other men of your company on the wagons."

Again Corporal Raynes grinned sheepishly.

"Yes, sir! they had their rifles taken, and

so are no longer combatants in a military sense. My rifle is missing also, sir."

"My, my, my!" murmured Captain Cortland in a tone of mock commiseration. "Then the scout who plundered you all may as well return all the property. But of course, Corporal, you and the two other men will continue to be non-combatants as long as the sham fighting lasts."

"Those are Captain Freeman's orders, sir."

Again Captain Cortland turned toward Hal Overton, nodding a signal. Hal stepped away briskly, but came back bearing the pair of shoes, the rifles and the canteens.

"Private Overton is the scout who entered your lines alone and brought about the discomfiture of C Company," Captain Cortland announced, smilingly.

The captain walked away while Corporal Raynes, sitting on the ground, drew on his shoes and laced them, while a lot of B Company's men stood about and grinned over his discomfiture.

"Corporal, you're sure good sleepers over in C Company," laughed Private Hyman. "You fellows want to look out that, some night, you don't get taken in by a lot of amateur hunters from New York."

"Great guns, what's going to happen to the regular Army, when it's getting so that a whole

company of infantry can't guard its own property?" another B Company man wanted to know.

Corporal Raynes and his two comrades had to stand a lot of good-natured joshing from the crowding men of B Company.

When he stood up, Raynes turned to Hal Overton.

"Rookie," he growled, "you want to look out hard in the future. I'll pay you back for this in kind. Just remember, kid, that Corporal Raynes wasn't born yesterday!"

Hal laughed good-humoredly. He didn't know, at that moment, that not many hours would pass ere Corporal Raynes would find his opportunity.

Twenty minutes after the wagon train had pulled out, B Company started cautiously through the country ahead. It was B Company's task to advance through a supposedly hostile country; C Company's part in the undertaking was either to annihilate B, or to capture the company.

It was ten o'clock that morning ere B and C came in touch. The point and scouting squad ran into one platoon of C.

"Deploy your men and take cover," ordered Lieutenant Prescott, who was in charge of the advance. "Each corporal regulate the firing

of his squad. Jam the fire in hard whenever you are sure you locate the enemy."

Bang! Bang! Bang! As fast as the squads reached their places on the line, each man some nine feet from his nearest fellows, the firing of blank ammunition ripped out fast and hard. There was all the excitement of actual warfare, except that no soldier was actually hit.

B Company's men would have been driven back had not Lieutenant Hampton swiftly arrived on the scene with the entire first platoon of B Company.

"We'll advance by rushes, Mr. Prescott," announced Lieutenant Hampton as soon as he reached the younger officer, who saluted.

Prescott hastened, crouching low, down along the left wing of the little command.

Presently Hampton's voice rose, even over the firing as it ran low, and called:

"Rise! Charge!"

Uttering their battle yell, the little force of infantry rushed forward in its thin line, while the hidden men of C Company poured in a heavy fire.

"Halt! Lie down!" shouted Lieutenant Hampton. "Ready, load, aim!"

There came a brief pause, followed by the order:

"Fire!"

A single volley crashed out, with such unanimity that it sounded as though one big piece had been fired.

"Ready! Open magazines! Load magazines! At will, commence firing!"

Fifteen rounds had been fired ere the bugler sounded furiously the order:

"Cease firing!"

The rush of feet sounded behind. Lieutenant Prescott rushed to the rear, but soon waved his sword reassuringly. It was the balance of B Company advancing on the run.

Captain Cortland now took command in person. He ordered another rush forward toward C Company's position.

Three volleys were fired after the rush. The fire was not answered. A cautious advance developed the fact that the force of C Company men had retired, nor could the line of their flight be discovered. B Company halted for a few moments, that the men might clean their sooty rifle chambers.

"We didn't really see the enemy," Hal remarked, as he worked his cleaning rod and a bit of waste through his gun barrel.

"In warfare nowadays you rarely do see the enemy," remarked Sergeant Hupner. "Attacking an enemy's position, nowadays, is a good deal like taking a gun and going into a dark room

where some one is shooting at you. You can't see the other fellow, but you have a mighty uncomfortable notion that he sees you and is shooting straight at you."

"Pleasant, when the game is real war," laughed Noll.

"Deadly, of course," commented Hupner.

Once again, late in the afternoon, C Company endeavored to ambush B Company. Captain Cortland's point and flankers, however, developed the enemy's position by drawing their fire. B Company, after a brisk fight of twenty minutes' duration, drove C Company back and continued to advance.

Despite the fact that no one had been really killed or wounded, most of the soldiers, who were serving their first enlistment, now found the game a wholly exciting one. When B Company halted, after the second engagement, the men fell into an eager discussion of the late engagement, the sergeants and other older men adding many comments out of their experiences in actual fighting.

"It leaves only real war to be desired," declared Hal, his cheeks glowing and his eyes snapping.

"Huh! If this was real war there'd be a lot of kids of the talky kind ducking to get away," growled Private Dowley as he slouched by.

"It isn't the kid soldiers who do the deserting in war time," returned Sergeant Hupner quietly. "It's usually some of the older men, who have such a grouch with life that one wouldn't think they'd care about living much longer."

Dowley scowled, muttering something, but he did not venture to dispute with a man of Hupner's military experience.

"I guess that ought to hold Dowley for five minutes," laughed Noll.

"That fellow gives me a sense of fatigue," remarked Sergeant Hupner placidly. "He might turn out to be a good soldier under stress, but all I've got to say is that I wouldn't want to have to defend a position with only a squad or two of men of his type. I wonder how the recruiting officer ever came to let him into the service?"

"Perhaps he got in under somebody else's name on a stolen set of references," laughed Hal.

"Sergeant Hupner, I want two of your men to send back with a message," announced Captain Cortland, stepping up.

"Overton and Terry are in good condition, sir," reported Hupner, rising and saluting as soon as he saw his commander.

"Very good; come with me, Overton and Terry."

Captain Cortland led the two young soldiers down the trail, drawing a local map from one of his pockets and spreading it on a flat table of rock.

"Study this map carefully, men, for I want you to be sure of the road you're to take. You will have to go back about four miles—two of it off this trail. You'll find a little telegraph station there. I want you to deliver, for transmission, this message to Colonel North, at Fort Clowdry."

"Yes, sir," Hal answered. "Shall we wait for the answer?"

"No; the answer will not be due until tomorrow. As soon as you have turned over your message, retrace your way to this point. B Company will have gone ahead. But a little way above here the trail broadens, and you'll find a house now and then. You can inquire for news of which way we've gone. You'll have to find us as best you can. And Overton!"

"Yes, sir."

"Remember that these are sham manœuvres, and that C Company stands for the enemy."

"Yes, sir."

"Either or both of you might be captured by a detachment from C Company."

"We'll do our level best to prevent that, sir," Hal promised, and Noll nodded with emphasis.

"Even worse than your own capture would be the capture of this message," Captain Cortland added impressively. "This message, in effect, is my attempt to communicate with my base of supplies, represented by Fort Clowdry. If you fail to put the message through, and C Company captures it, then Captain Freeman and his men have scored heavily against us."

"Is it proper for me to ask, sir, whether Captain Freeman knows that you are trying to send this message?"

"Captain Freeman does not know, to a certainty, but he may suspect, and he may have men out to catch you."

"Thank you, sir. C Company's men won't get us if there's any way to prevent it."

"Join the company as soon as you can locate us, men. Firing may guide you, but, in that case, you'll have to avoid joining the wrong company."

Both young soldiers once more saluted. Then, with the message securely tucked in Hal's haversack, the bunkies started down the trail. They had not gone many yards ere they heard the orders for Cortland's company to fall in for the advance.

A mile of the distance Hal and Noll had covered when they encountered the slow-moving wagon train.

"Hello, rookies!" called Corporal Raynes banteringly. "Where are you headed."

"Yes, it's surely a fine day, Corporal," nodded Hal, as the two bunkies hurried on.

"That Overton kid is the one I must get hunk with before many days are over," grunted Raynes. "I must make him look as cheap with his company commander as he's made me look with mine."

When the wagon train had gone about two miles and a half further up the trail Corporal Raynes shook with his own chuckles.

He had run across his chance, and was shrewd enough to recognize it.

CHAPTER VI

RAYNES FINDS A PATRIOTIC ALLY

THE trail was broader here.

Some thirty feet from the rough road an old-time log cabin, well preserved, stood in a little grove of trees.

Before the door, on a backless chair, sat an old man, roughly clad in buckskin, who was dividing his time between talking to a dog and cleaning the old rifle that lay across his knees.

As the horses had had a hard pull, the wagon boss ordered a halt on this level stretch of trail.

Corporal Raynes, his head buzzing with half a dozen plans, leaped down from the wagon in his restored shoes. He sauntered slowly over to this old-time hunter.

"'Day, Pop," he greeted the old man.

"'Day," grunted the other. "You're a soger, I reckon?"

"Yes," admitted Raynes, seating himself on the ground and producing his pipe. "Uniform gives me away, doesn't it?"

"Some," returned the old hunter. "There's been a thunderin' lot of ye around to-day. I've heard a heap of firing twicet to-day."

Corporal Raynes nodded.

"Wa'n't shooting up nothing real, was ye?" inquired the old man.

"No, Pop; what we call manœuvres," Raynes explained.

"Jest plain, tom-fool, sham fighting, eh?"

"That's it," nodded the corporal. "But it isn't so tom-fool, after all. It teaches soldiers a lot about the real manœuvres of war."

"Huh! I wonder ef it teaches ary mother's son of ye any better how to fight the Japs when your time comes?"

"You think we're going to fight the Japs some day, do you?" inquired Raynes, finishing the filling of his pipe.

"Think?" retorted the old man testily. "I don't have to think. Some day we've got to depend on you sogers to drive them pesky brown critters back into the Pacific Ocean, or the Japs will own the whole coast and clean up here to the Rockies."

"You don't seem to like the Japs, Pop?" observed Corporal Raynes, puffing at his pipe.

"Like 'em? The same way I do pizen, rattlers and grizzlies!" exclaimed the old man with unlooked-for passion.

Corporal Raynes jumped inwardly with glee. In a flash the whole of his plan came to him.

"Have you seen any soldiers go by on this trail, Pop?" asked Raynes.

"Some," nodded the old man. " 'Bout an hour ago nigh onter a hundred of 'em went by. 'Bout twenty minutes ergo 'nuther hundred or so came along and tramped up that way. They didn't stop, so I didn't ask any questions."

"If you had," prodded Corporal Raynes, "you would have learned something. The first company was C Company, and they represent American soldiers."

"Well, that's what they are—American sogers. Why shouldn't they stand for it?"

"But you see, the second company that went by here—B Company—they stand for Japs. In the game of manœuvres that the officers are playing the second company, B, are supposed to be a force of Japanese troops that are chasing the American troops through the Rockies."

"What do they wanter play that for?" demanded the old hunter, his eyes blazing wrathfully. "Why don't yer fool officers play that it's American sogers chasing Japs back to where they belong?"

"Well, you see, the Americans may yet win out, before the game is played through," Raynes offered consolingly. "It all depends on which company is manœuvred better by its officers. I belong to C Company, by the way; the American forces, you know."

"Well, I reckon I like ye better for that," nodded the old man.

"Pop, I wonder if you'd be willing to help the American company beat the Japanese company and bag it, whole hog?" proposed Raynes cleverly.

"Would I?" demanded the old man eagerly. "But, sho! What could I do, d'ye reckon?"

"Now, Pop, I reckon a couple of hours from now, or maybe three, there'll be two young soldiers come up along this way. You'll know 'em when you see 'em."

Raynes dropped into a description of Hal and Noll, while the old man listened attentively.

"Now, they'll probably ask you, Pop, which way the second company went. That's B Company, the Japs, you know. If they don't ask you outright, then you must fix it for 'em to ask you."

"I'll manage it," nodded the old hunter, a look of craft coming into his eyes.

"Now, don't let the make-believe Jap soldiers know that their company kept on up this trail. Tell 'em anything you like that'll send them off the trail—over to that hill, say," continued Corporal Raynes, pointing to a rocky peak distant about three miles. "Send 'em hiking straight over there. Then they won't get through with their news in time, and the Amer-

ican company will have a fair chance to bag the Jap company, whole hog. D'you see?"

"Don't I, though?" demanded the old-time hunter.

"Think you can work it, Pop?"

"Young man," demanded the hunter, "d'ye reckon I look like anybody's fool?"

"You sure don't," nodded Raynes. "And here's something to pay you for your trouble."

The scheming corporal tried to slip a two-dollar bill into the other's hand, but the latter drew away from it.

"Take it," urged Raynes. "It's government money."

"Young man, I'm an American, and I don't have to be paid to stand by my own country! I'll do all ye say, and more, ef I git a chance, jest to see the American company wallop the make-believe Jap company."

"You'll do us a huge service if you don't fall down on the job, Pop. Why, the news will travel all the way to Japan, and the Japs will gnash their teeth over it."

"I'll put the trick through fur ye, young man—even if I have to use bear traps to ketch the two young soger boys ye told me about," promised the aged hunter earnestly.

"Say, Corporal, cut your tether, if you're going to ride with us," called the wagon boss.

"I'm coming," announced Corporal Raynes, rising. "Don't forget, Pop," he whispered back over his shoulder.

"Ye kin trust me, young man!"

By the time he was out of sight of the cabin, around a turn of the road, the chuckles inside of Corporal Raynes got so close to the surface that they surged over.

"What's the smile, Corporal?" demanded the wagon boss.

"Oh, I'm pretty near choking over one of the lying yarns that old fellow told me about how he bagged twelve grizzlies single handed one day," lied the corporal.

"He must be a talented old liar," nodded the wagon boss.

"He is," agreed Corporal Raynes. "I never could understand, either, why anyone would take the trouble to lie unless he was paid for it."

* * * * * * * *

Hal and Noll, all unsuspicious of trouble of any other kind than that against which Captain Cortland had warned them, kept on cautiously along the trail, then branched off at the road shown them on the map. Two miles further on they reached a village, with its two hotels for health-seekers, cottages and other buildings.

Even in this basin in the mountains the Western Union Company had penetrated. The two

young military messengers found the telegraph office, turned over their message and then were ready to return.

"But, war or no war," declared Noll bluntly, "I'm not going to start back until I've crossed the street and had an ice cream soda."

"We'll have two," laughed Hal boyishly, "and then make up for lost time on the trail."

Unmindful of the curious glances cast at two soldiers in full field equipment, Hal and Noll enjoyed their treat to the utmost. Then they started back, traveling fast.

Nor did they run into any lurking detachments from C Company. Their "hike," as a fast march is termed, was uneventful until they reached the old hunter's cabin.

"Pop" was awaiting their coming, and a keen look flashed into his old eyes when he saw them and recognized them from Raynes's description.

"Sogers, hey?" he demanded, going sociably down to the road.

"Yes, sir," nodded Hal respectfully as he paused.

"Seen a lot of 'em go by to-day," continued the hunter.

"Then you're the man we want to see, sir," went on Private Overton. "Did two companies go by this way?"

"Yes, soger boy. They was 'bout three-quar-

ters of an hour apart. And I reckon ye belong to the second one. Let me describe yer captain."

The old hunter gave a clear description of the personal appearance of B Company's commander. There is little that escapes a hunter's eyes or recollection.

"Yes," broke in Hal eagerly. "That was our commander, Captain Cortland."

"I wanted to be dead sure," resumed the old hunter artfully, "for yer captain left a message for ye, and he wanted me to be partic'lar that no other sogers got it."

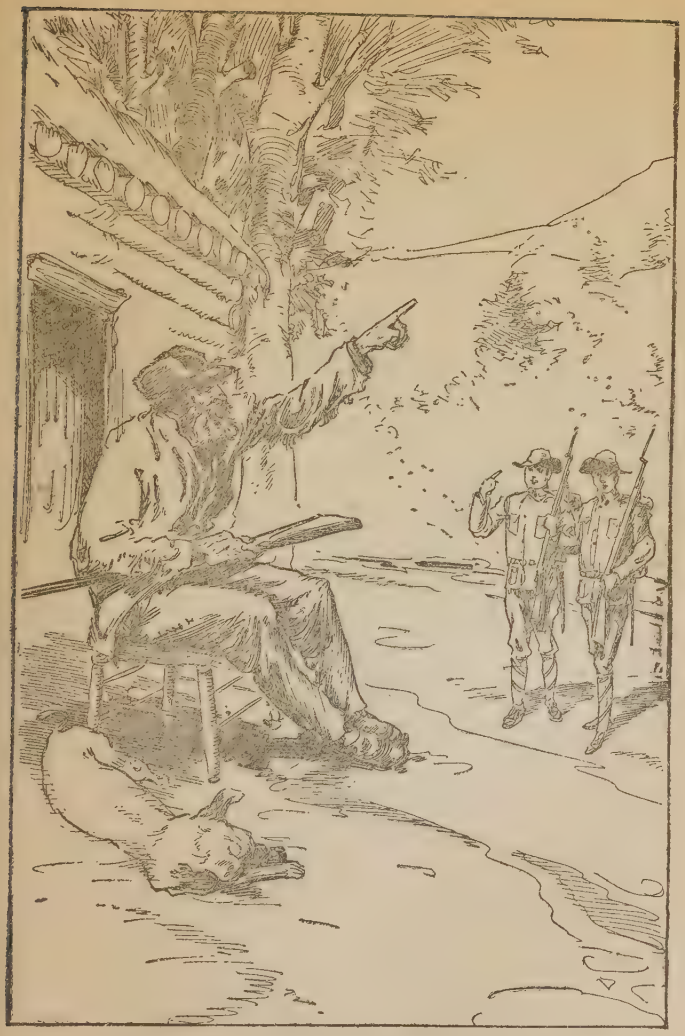
"Naturally," assented Hal unsuspiciously.

"Jest above here," continued the hunter, "yer captain turned his men to the left and went off over the rocks, kinder careful like, as though he didn't want any other sogers to see where his men was going."

"Yes; of course," agreed Hal. "That's part of field manœuvres."

"The word yer captain left with me, soger boy, was that he was going to camp his men—hidden, of course, ye understand—on that peak yonder to-night. That's where he said ye two soger boys was to join yer company. Reckon ye kin travel over that-a-way? There ain't no trail to that peak, ye understand?"

"Of course we can, sir," Hal answered re-



"Yer Company's Going to Camp Yonder, On That Peak."

spectfully. "If the rest of the company can go to that peak we can follow our comrades there."

"Then I've delivered my message from yer captain," finished the old hunter with a satisfied air.

"And thank you very much," acknowledged Hal. Both he and Noll saluted the venerable old man of former times.

"Nice spoken soger lads, them," muttered "Pop," as he watched the bunkies step off the trail and start to cross the rocky wastes to the distant peak. "If they wa'n't make-believe Japs in this tom-fool sham fight I'd feel ashamed of myself. But I reckon a little extry hardship will do 'em good, anyway."

"Say," muttered Noll, halting, when they had gone something more than a mile of the rough way, "I don't want to criticize my commanding officer, but I wish he had chosen a camping spot that was easier to reach."

"It's a dandy good place up on that peak, anyway," laughed Hal, whose feet were beginning to feel decidedly sore. "C Company's men wouldn't enjoy hiking over this rough ground in the dark to make a night attack."

They covered another mile.

"I'm beginning to think that old fellow gave us a false scent," grumbled Noll. "I don't believe Captain Cortland would be heartless

enough to march heavily laden soldiers over ground like this."

"Why, the old man back at the cabin was the soul of courtesy, and he described Captain Cortland to a dot," returned Hal.

Dusk was coming on by the time the bunkies had covered the rest of the distance, and had reached the ledges near the top of the lonely peak.

"Now, where's B Company?" demanded Noll almost savagely.

"Come along this way," proposed Overton. "We'll explore."

Through the gloaming the sore-footed soldier boys plodded on until Noll suddenly halted, gripping Hal stoutly.

Right in front of them, ambling their way, came a huge furry something. It wasn't a grizzly, but it was the next worse thing—an unusually large, dark-brown bear.

"Duck!" counseled Private Overton, promptly wheeling about. "Slip in a ball cartridge as you run!"

Nor did Noll lose any time in following the advice, for the brown bear was now in swift pursuit, growling ominously.

Somehow, it didn't seem easy to slip in a ball cartridge while they were running at top speed.

"There's a ledge. Get in behind it, and I'll

follow, Noll!" shouted Hal, crowding his bunkie toward the ledge.

Down behind the ledge dropped both bunkies.

There was an opening in the rock of some sort behind them, but in their haste neither young soldier stopped to look at it.

Hal had succeeded in slipping a cartridge into his rifle. Noll did that, and also fixed his bayonet at the muzzle of his piece.

Bang! went Hal's gun, but he had "bear ague."

"Missed him, Noll! Take quick, sure aim!"

But at that instant another hoarse growl sounded behind them, and Private Terry could fairly feel his hair rise under his campaign sombrero as he yelled:

"Here's another coming at us in the rear, Hal! Must be the old female bear!"

CHAPTER VII

BEARS AND OTHER TROUBLES

NOR was there any doubt about the correctness of Noll Terry's guess.

He had only time to back against the ledge when the bear from the rear, uttering a nasty, growling snarl, leaped straight for him.

But Noll had braced the butt of his rifle against the ledge, the bayonet up.

It was no plan on Terry's part. He did it either instinctively or through sheer luck.

In the meantime the male bear, showing two fearsome rows of teeth, was crawling over the ledge from outside to get at Hal Overton.

Let it be frankly stated, Hal's teeth were almost a-chatter. He was scared all the way through, but he did not lose his head.

Shooting back the bolt of his rifle, he reached for another cartridge.

He had already used one, and only six to a man had been issued on this period of field duty.

There was no time to slip in the cartridge. Overton was compelled to leap up straight and club his gun.

Thump! Down came the butt of the weapon

with a force that would have cracked the skull of a man.

But bruin merely stumbled.

Just then another thump sounded, followed instantly by a snarl of pain.

The she bear had sprung straight for Noll, but rifle and bayonet were in the way.

Noll held his gun rigidly, though not by calculation. All but frozen with terror he would not have been capable of action.

So the flying bear struck squarely against the bayonet, hurling herself with her whole weight and momentum against the point of the steel.

But the bayonet did not touch a vital spot. There was still a big amount of fight left in the she bear.

As she lurched backward the huge beast almost jerked the rifle out of Noll's hands, for the bayonet was still deeply imbedded.

At the instant of clubbing his gun Hal had had his cartridge in one of his hands.

Now young Private Overton loaded faster than ever he had been able to do in drill.

Bang! The sharp report rang almost deafeningly in the narrow confines at the mouth of the cave back of the ledge.

Hal had shot his bear, though he had not inflicted a mortal hurt.

But bruin backed off, snarling, desiring to

study the scene for a second or two before deciding on further attack.

That nearly stunning report had the effect of bringing Noll to his senses. He had a cartridge in his chamber. Cocking the piece, he pulled the trigger feverishly.

He inflicted another wound on the she bear, though he did not put that maddened animal out of business. Yet the beast drew back so sharply that Private Terry was able to free his bayonet from entanglement.

"Fix your bayonet, Hal, if you have a chance," shouted Noll Terry, as he now leaped gallantly after the maddened animal that was claiming his attention.

Hal did, not a moment too soon, for now bruin was at him again.

Two quick, sharp thrusts Hal made, the first just as bruin was rising on his hind feet to advance to hug the young soldier.

The second thrust tapped bruin on the left shoulder just as he sank to all fours.

Then Private Overton turned sick again, as he saw the dripping fangs of the beast come closer.

Darting back a dozen feet, Overton, in frantic haste, jammed in his third cartridge.

"Steady, boy!" he urged himself. "This is for your life!"

Bruin made a spring. The muzzle of the rifle was not four feet from the male bear's heart as Hal Overton pulled the trigger.

That was the end of bruin. The beast fell and rolled over on his side.

Like a flash Hal turned to see what help his bunkie needed.

Plenty of it, apparently, for Noll, crowded back to the wall, was making furious drives with his bayoneted gun in his efforts to keep the she bear from leaping and forcing him down to the ground.

Hal had to think like lightning.

He decided on a cartridge.

Slipping back his bolt, and thus ejecting the cartridge shell in the chamber, Overton jammed fresh ammunition home.

Click! shot the bolt faintly.

Dropping to one knee, in the gloom Hal aimed, as nearly as he could judge, just behind the left fore-shoulder of the she bear. Then he pulled on the trigger just as the she bear sprang at Noll Terry.

At the report the she bear toppled over with a grunt of pain. Noll leaped forward, thrusting his bayonet time after time.

Private Overton, clubbing his rifle, delivered several forceful whacks over the head of the expiring animal, which then lay quiet.

"We've settled their case, Noll," Hal remarked in an awed voice.

"Glad of it," quoth Noll dryly.

To their ears now came a whining further back in the cave.

"More bears?" asked Noll grimly. "If so, I'm in favor of sounding a retreat."

"And I'll be with you," agreed Soldier Hal. "But wait a second. I've a box of blazer matches with me. First, slip all your cartridges into your magazine."

Both soldiers did this. Then Hal, striking a blazer match, led the way back into the cave.

"Poor little beggars," he muttered suddenly. "I thought so."

"What?" asked Noll, stepping forward.

"Look."

"Cubs!"

"No wonder the old she bear was savage," glowed Noll.

On a rude bed of dried leaves and twigs tumbled five furry, fuzzy, whining little bear cubs.

"We've broken up a family's happiness this night," muttered Hal, looking down.

"Well, it was their family, or two bunkies," retorted Noll, nevertheless feeling almost ashamed as he bent down over the innocent, harmless, bereaved little cubs.

"Shall we put 'em out of their misery?" asked Hal.

"I—I haven't the heart to."

"Well, I'm afraid I haven't that kind of heart, either. But, see here, Noll!"

"Well?"

"We're in the heart of the enemy's country. If one of C Company's scouting detachments comes this way I don't want them to find the two dead bears and take 'em away in triumph. It would be treason to our own B Company to let C Company come in for an unearned feast on nice, juicy bear steaks."

"That's so," agreed Noll.

"Help me, and we'll drag both carcasses back into the extreme inner end of the cave. Then, if Captain Cortland approves, he can send men here and it will be B Company that'll feast on bear steaks."

Both bunkies worked industriously until this task had been accomplished.

"Speaking of bear steaks," announced Hal, "makes me realize that I'm famished myself. Now, as we're clear off the trail of B Company—and that's no dream—we'll have to put in the night finding our comrades. So a few minutes spent munching hardtack won't count."

"And not forgetting the salted almonds we

bought in the village this afternoon," rejoined the other young soldier.

Down on the floor of the cave the bunkies squatted themselves.

The work of eating absorbed both for the next few minutes.

Then, of a sudden, they halted, astonished.

Human footsteps sounded on the rocks outside.

Privates Overton and Terry stopped their eating, neither venturing to speak, for a voice outside was saying:

"Sergeant, instruct the men not to light fires. They'll have to sup on hard tack alone to-night. Fires would betray us to the enemy."

Then Hal placed his mouth close to Noll's ear and whispered:

"Bunkie, we're pickled!"

Noll pressed his comrade's arm understandingly.

"Pickled and sealed in jars," Hal's whisper continued. "C Company is camping here, and we'll be prisoners inside of a minute. And, great Scott—C Company eats the bear steaks!"

CHAPTER VIII

IN THE MIDST OF THE "HOSTILES"

IT was a pretty fix, indeed!

"Confound that lying old hunter down at the cabin!" ground Noll wrathfully behind his teeth.

Then both bunkies from B Company held their very breath.

Out beyond the ledge, near the mouth of the cave, a figure paced. Hal, as his eyes became accustomed to the darkness, was sure that this man was Captain Freeman. Just a little later the young soldier was sure of it, for another figure approached and saluted.

"Captain, I have to report that I have placed the guard as you directed."

"That's Lieutenant Holmes. Pretty nearly as fine a fellow as our own second lieutenant, Prescott," thought Hal.

"You impressed upon each of the men the cautions that I want observed?" queried Captain Freeman.

"Yes, sir," answered Lieutenant Holmes, "and I took the liberty of adding another caution on my own account."

"What was that, Mr. Holmes?"

"I told each member of the guard, when I left him, to look well to it that that young scout of B Company, Overton, didn't get his rifle."

Captain Freeman laughed quietly, then added:

"Overton is a very capable young soldier, Mr. Holmes, and a good man in the service. But just now, while these manœuvres are on, I'd like to make a prisoner of him, I can tell you."

"Wouldn't you, though?" shivered Hal, listening from where he crouched, while Noll pressed his bunkie's arm again. "And I'm very much afraid, captain, that you're likely to have your wish!"

"Ah, here comes the other member of our council. Good evening, Ray."

"Good evening, sir," replied the first lieutenant of C Company.

"Ray," continued Captain Freeman, "we were just discussing Overton, the scout of B Company, who made off with the arms of our outpost last night."

"Well, sir, we have some pretty fair scouts of our own to-night," laughed Lieutenant Ray. "I'd like to wager a month's pay that not a soul of B Company knows where this command is to-night. On the other hand, we know to a dot where B Company is encamped."

"And we'll have the enemy potted by eleven o'clock to-night," promised Captain Freeman in a tone of conviction. "But that's the least we're obliged to do after the disgraceful treatment that we had to stand last night. Unless our scouts bring different word by half past nine to-night, we'll slip in on 'em while they're asleep, rush the sentries and have B Company's camp for our own almost before the first blank cartridge has been exploded. It's fine work to roll in on your enemy and demolish him while he's asleep and dreaming of home."

All three of the officers laughed heartily.

"Their camp is well chosen, too," continued Captain Freeman. "In behind the rocks, just the other side of the blasted twin oaks, makes an ideal camp for a single company of infantry."

"By which route do you plan to approach, sir?" asked Lieutenant Ray.

"Through the ravine from the east," replied Captain Freeman, "for the simple reason that Cortland would least of all expect an attack from that quarter."

"It couldn't be better," declared Ray.

A fourth man now joined the group, saluting all three.

"What is it, my man?" inquired Freeman.

"Supper is ready for the officers, sir."

"Very good, Stubbles. We'll come at once."

Stubbles was Captain Freeman's "dog-robber," or field cook, one of the privates of C Company.

The steps of the departing officers soon quieted down and ceased.

"Oh, Noll, we've got to get out of here now," breathed Private Overton in an agitated tone in his bunkie's ear.

"Of course," retorted Private Terry. "We'll get out by airship, I suppose?"

"No joking, old fellow. We've simply got to get out, and then we've got to run all the way to the blasted twin oaks. You remember the place?"

"Perfectly," nodded Noll, though his bunkie could not see his head in the deep darkness of the interior of the cave.

"We've got to get there on the jump," Hal whispered. "Not a minute to lose!"

"Regardless of the fact that C Company is in camp all around us?" quizzed Noll.

"Noll, I tell you, we've got to get through the lines at once!"

"Make a break and run for it, trusting to luck and our ability to knock a lot of men down?" queried Terry.

"No, sir! We've got to get out, and away from here, without letting a soul from C Com-

pany know that we've been within miles of here to-night!"

"What nice, new problems you do put up!" murmured Noll ironically. "What earthly show, bunkie, have we to get out of here without being seen?"

"Oh, we may be seen," admitted Hal, a new and desperate scheme flashing through his brain.

"Then——" began Noll.

"But not recognized, bunkie. See here, Noll, I'm going softly down to the mouth of the cave. From here you can see me, against what light there is in the sky. Watch me. If I wave my hand, come to me. Bring your rifle, too, but unfix the bayonet and return it to your belt."

"But what——"

"Noll, the company is at supper now. The men have something especial to think of while they're eating. If we just lounge through the camp together, with our hats well forward over our faces, and keep from going too close to the groups, I don't believe any one will give us any thought, or recognize us in the dark. Understand, we'll just saunter until we get outside the lines. Then we'll vanish and duck as softly and swiftly as we can."

"By Jove, it's worth trying!" glowed Noll.

"Yes; because it's the only single chance there is of our getting back to B Company in time with the news. Wait—and watch!"

First Hal carefully took his own bayonet from the muzzle of his rifle, returning it to place at his belt. Then, on hands and knees, he crept forward to the mouth of the cave, cautiously peering beyond.

At last he signaled back.

In another moment Noll was by his side.

"Now, step out, old fellow," whispered Hal, rising. "Don't betray any sign of trying to escape attention. But, if you're spoken to, make believe you don't hear. Keep up your nerve, bunkie! This is real work for good old B Company and victory!"

In another instant the two soldier boys stepped carelessly out into plain sight, their sombreros drawn well down over their eyes.

C Company was just ahead at supper. As nonchalantly as possible the two young soldiers of B Company began their leisurely stroll through the "hostile" camp of C Company.

Could they hope to "get away" with this daring trick?

CHAPTER IX

PLANNING FOR THE NIGHT ATTACK

FOR a distance of several yards the soldier boys proceeded through the darkness without appearing to attract any attention.

The officers and soldiers of C Company were finishing their hasty, cheerless meal. There was nothing strange about two soldiers having finished ahead of the rest and deciding for a stroll through the camp.

The darkness was the greatest protection of our young friends. They refrained from going very close to any group. Added to this, their campaign sombreros were so well drawn down over their faces as to hide a good deal of their features, and this without exciting suspicion.

Hal and Noll were two thirds of the way through the camp, when there came a sharp hail that made Private Overton quiver inside:

"Hey, there!"

There could be no doubt that the hail was intended for the soldier boys, though neither gave any heed, even by as much as turning.

"Look out Overton, of B Company, doesn't catch you!" jeered the same voice.

Noll threw one hand behind him, waving it.

"Don't go more than ten or twenty yards beyond our lines, men," warned Captain Freeman, looking up from the hard tack at which he had been munching.

Hal wheeled about, saluting respectfully, but did not trust himself to speak.

Then the chums continued their slow stroll.

Three minutes later they were just beyond the edge of the camp, halting beside a bush.

"Here's our chance," whispered Hal, glancing just past the roots of the bush.

A little gully started there. Twenty feet further on it was more than six feet deep.

Hal passed around the bush, dropping into the gully. In another moment Noll had leisurely joined him.

Now, they traveled faster over the bed of the gully, though they were careful to go cat-footed, for they had yet to pass sentries, very likely outposts, and there was a grave risk of their running into some scouting detachment from C Company.

The gully ran for some two hundred yards. Then the soldier boys came out in the open once more.

"More caution than ever now," whispered Hal, detaining his bunkie by a strong grip on the arm.

"We must be beyond their guard line," Noll returned in a whisper.

"Don't you believe it! Freeman isn't the captain to maintain lax guard. Don't attempt to stand up. Crouch low, and get all the cover you can behind bushes. Better let me lead. I'll halt often and listen."

With great stealth the pair had covered another two hundred yards or so, when there came a sharp hail of:

"Halt! Who's there."

The challenge had come from some one invisible to the bunkies. Hal instantly and noiselessly dropped to the ground, lying as flat as he could.

Noll imitated his example.

"Halt! Who's there?" came the insistent challenge.

Then the lurkers heard a man coming toward them. Neither dared stir, as the slightest noise might prove enough for their undoing. It was a desperate situation, at any rate, for it hardly seemed possible that the sentry could fail to come upon them.

But in another minute the sentry had halted.

"Huh!" the bunkies heard him mutter. "I reckon I'm getting as nervous as a sick cat, after what happened to Corporal Raynes's outpost last night."

Then the lurkers heard the sentry slowly returning to the point from which he had first challenged them.

It was three full minutes ere cautious Private Overton ventured to crawl away from the spot. He crawled for more than a hundred and fifty yards, too, ere he ventured to rise to crouch, peering all around him. Then he nodded to Noll, close behind him, and the bunkies proceeded.

It was not until they had made fifteen minutes more of the most stealthy progress that Hal and Noll began to feel really easy.

"Now, see here, bunkie," spoke Private Overton at last, "we're not as well 'out of the woods' as we might be fooled into imagining. I think it is even dangerous for us to go together just now. We might run into a scouting detachment, lurking among the rocks, or behind bushes, and get captured after all. Look hard through the darkness. Do you see that massive, peculiar formation of rock ahead? About three quarters of a mile from here, I would say."

"Yes; I remember noting it in daylight," nodded Terry.

"All right. You make a wide detour to the left, and I'll do the same to the right. Go cautiously every step of the way, and have your

eyes and ears open. Take your time. I'll meet you there."

"But what's the good of doing that?" objected Noll.

"Just this: If we go together we may run into a superior force of the enemy and be captured. If we go singly we won't both be caught by the same force, anyway, and there'll be a chance for one of us to get through to Captain Cortland with the news. Left oblique for yours, Noll! March!"

It was nearly fifteen minutes later when the chums met at the spot agreed upon.

"Whew!" muttered Hal, halting, as he came up and recognized his bunkie. "I guess we're safely away now, Noll. That being the case, I don't mind admitting to you that when we left the cave and stepped out into the camp, I hadn't a belief in the world, hardly, that we'd get away with our strategy."

"Oh, my shoes!" winced Noll.

"What's the matter with them?"

"Oh, nothing, except that they're full of sore feet!"

"I've some trouble of that sort myself," Hal grinned. "But we've got to forget all about it until we get to the twin oaks. Forward, bunkie!"

They traveled together, after that. An hour

later they heard the most welcome challenge in the world:

"Halt! Who's there?"

The speaker belonged to a B Company outpost.

"Friends," replied Private Overton.

"How many friends?"

"Two."

The sentry spoke something in an undertone. Then, after a brief pause, he continued:

"Advance two friends, but two only, to be recognized.

As the bunkies came up they saw Corporal Cotter and two privates eyeing them.

"Oh, if it's the kid soldiers, they're all right," spoke Corporal Cotter easily.

"Corporal," begged Hal, "show us the quickest, easiest cut to camp. I've news for Captain Cortland."

"Been scouting some more?" laughed Cotter.

"My news, Corporal, is for the company commander."

"That's all right, kid. See the grove yonder?"

"Surely."

"Right in the middle of that you'll find the tent of the company officers. They're asleep, I guess. Sergeant Hupner is commander of the

guard, and Lieutenant Prescott is officer of the day."

"Thank you, Corporal."

"Proceed!"

Two minutes later the bunkies were halted by one of the camp sentries. Then they hurried direct into camp.

At a distance of some twenty yards young Lieutenant Prescott was found seated on the ground, talking in low tones with Sergeant Hupner. The young West Pointer leaped quickly to his feet when he saw the soldier boys approaching.

"Sir," announced Hal, saluting, "we report our return to the company."

"You've completed this afternoon's duty?"

"Yes, sir—and much more."

"How more?" queried Lieutenant Dick Prescott, eyeing them closely.

"Lieutenant, we desire, sir, to speak with Captain Cortland at once."

"It's as important as that?" asked Prescott.

"Judge for yourself, sir. We have just returned from C Company's camp, and we've heard Captain Freeman and his officers discussing the plan by which they expect to attack this camp to-night and bag B Company whole hog."

"You've been to C Company's camp?" re-

peated Lieutenant Prescott, eyeing the rookies closely. "Wasn't that exceeding your instructions by a very wide margin?"

"We didn't go there by design, sir. It's a long story."

"And you do well to remind me that I am wasting time in not calling Captain Cortland," continued the young lieutenant. "Wait here, men."

It was barely more than a minute when Lieutenant Prescott came back with Captain Cortland and Lieutenant Hampton.

"What's this I hear, Overton?" demanded B Company's commander. "C Company expects to bag us here to-night?"

"Yes, sir."

"How?"

Hal briefly sketched the plan, as he understood it, of attacking the camp by moving up through the ravine.

"We've a sentry down at the ravine," declared Captain Cortland. "But, Mr. Prescott, I believe you would do well to rouse enough men to create an emergency outpost beyond the other end of the ravine. Also send a small scouting detachment out considerably beyond the ravine. But instruct the scouts to be prepared for a quick recall at any moment."

Lieutenant Prescott saluted his superior officer, then hastened away to rout out the needed men and post them.

"Go on with your story, Overton. Better give it all to us in order, but be brief in the telling, my man."

So Hal plunged promptly into the narration of what he and Noll had been through, beginning with the false scent on which they had been sent by the hunter at the cabin.

Captain Cortland held out his hand almost impulsively, both to Hal and to Noll.

"My men," he said earnestly, "I must tell you that I believe you both did wisely in adopting the profession of arms. Obedience is the first requisite of the soldier. The records of both of you stand well in that respect. But scouting work, which comes under the head of the service of information and security, is of the utmost importance in a campaign, and you two show positive genius as scouts. This is all of a piece with your great work of last night, Overton. I shall not forget it. As every man will be called within fifteen minutes, you may remain here under Sergeant Hupner's orders. Mr. Hampton, you and I will take a brief stroll and decide swiftly upon what we are to do."

"Lads," broke in Sergeant Hupner, as the officers strolled away, "either you're mighty

lucky or else you're born soldiers. I believe it is the latter."

Five minutes later the two senior company officers returned.

"Sergeant Hupner, we are going to call the men, but no bugle will be sounded," stated Captain Cortland. "Rouse the remaining sergeants first; then instruct them to rouse all the men and with great quietness."

B Company was soon aroused; in ten minutes more all of the guard except the soldiers down by the ravine had been recalled.

"We won't strike our tents," Cortland informed his sergeants. "It will do no harm to leave the camp standing, especially if the enemy's commander uses his night glasses at a distance. He will feel certain that we are nicely bagged. Now, pass the word, without loud command, for the company to fall in."

Two minutes later, in single file, B Company marched toward the ravine like so many unsubstantial spectres.

CHAPTER X

TRAPPERS AND TRAPPED

"HALT, who's there?"

A single sentry, just at the opening of the ravine, called the challenge in a low voice.

There was no response.

"Halt! Who's there?"

There still being no response, the sentry advanced toward a line of bushes.

He stepped through, peering beyond.

Almost without sound four C Company men leaped at the sentry, clutching him by the throat and bearing him to the ground.

The captured sentry was able to make only a low gurgling sound in his throat. His rifle was snatched away from him. Working at professional speed, the sentry was gagged and bound, then tossed upon the ground once more, while a C Company man sat upon him.

"Now, take the word back, Daly," ordered the non-commissioned officer in command of the captors.

The sentry did not offer to struggle. It was as though he feared physical punishment would

be inflicted upon him if he dared attempt to make trouble.

Little did the exultant C Company men dream that this solitary sentry was the only man on guard duty for B Company. The fact was that this sentry had been posted with explicit instructions to allow himself to be captured without making any outcry or firing his rifle.

Three minutes later the ground about the captured sentry appeared to be covered with dimly defined figures of advancing men—soldiers in full field equipment.

It was C Company, advancing by column of twos, with Captain Freeman and Lieutenant Ray at the head, and Lieutenant Greg Holmes, alertly watchful of the line, at the rear.

Into the ravine C Company advanced, moving with barely a sound. It was Freeman's intention to reform his men once they were through the ravine and advance, yelling and firing, upon a surprised camp.

The head, then the center of the line, slipped into the ravine. At last the whole of C Company was fairly within the ravine.

Nor did Captain Freeman have the slightest idea of the many pairs of keen eyes that watched the progress of his command from the tops of the low walls of stone that bound the ravine.

Above stood Captain Cortland, well concealed in a bush, watching, revolver in hand.

Bang!

Captain Cortland fired his revolver into the ground—the signal shot.

Instantly a tempest of firing broke loose. Men stationed on either side, above the ravine, poured down their rifle fire—of blank ammunition, of course.

From the inner end of the ravine two squads of men fired from behind hastily erected intrenchments.

"Sound the retreat!" roared Freeman, above the din of the firing, in the ear of the bugler at his side.

But with the first notes of the bugle a din of reports and a belching of flame came from other B Company men, now stationed at the end of the ravine through which C Company had just entered.

The ambuscade was complete. Under any war conditions C Company was hopelessly engulfed, and ready for complete slaughter.

Suddenly the bugler up aloft, stationed by Captain Cortland's side, blew as though he would blow his lungs out, the signal for "cease firing."

Then the din of musketry died down.

"Captain Freeman," called Cortland, "I call

upon you to surrender your command. You must realize that, under war conditions, you have already lost nearly every man of your force."

"I surrender my command," replied Captain Freeman promptly. "As you say, Cortland, you have us wholly at your mercy."

At the word, passed by their non-commissioned officers, the wearied men of C Company squatted on the ground.

"I take it I may go through the ravine to your camp, Cortland," called Captain Freeman, "now that we are harmless prisoners of war."

"Yes; you had better march your company through into the open and we'll join you."

"Thank heaven the cruel war is over," muttered a soldier in C Company, and a hearty laugh from victors and vanquished answered this sally.

Ten minutes later the recent mimic combatants were all together on the same ground.

But Captain Freeman was burning with curiosity.

"May I ask, Cortland," he demanded, "how on earth you guessed our plans so well that you had that trap spread for us?"

"I didn't guess your plans," smiled Captain Cortland.

"Oh, come now!"

"Not a bit of guess about it, my dear Freeman. I knew your whole plan for to-night."

"Knew it?"

"Yes."

"You had scouts out, Cortland, who detected our advance? From your knowledge of our advance you cleverly guessed our plan?"

"Oh, no! As I just said, I knew your plan, and did not have to guess it."

"But how?" pressed Captain Freeman, still disconsolate and much mystified.

"Indirectly, I had the plan from your own lips. In other words, Freeman, scouts of mine were in your camp at early dark to-night. They heard you and your officers discussing the plan. Then, very naturally, my scouts brought the information to me."

"Scouts?" cried the bewildered commander of C Company. "By Jove, I remember two men who strolled down through my camp to-night. I called to them to keep close to our lines."

"But they didn't," chuckled Captain Cortland gleefully, "for those two men whom you hailed happened to be my scouts."

Captain Freeman took two great, gulping breaths in his sheer amazement.

"Cortland, now that the sham campaign is over," he begged, "may I know who your scouts were?"

"Certainly, my dear Freeman. They were Privates Overton and Terry."

"Overton!" gasped Captain Freeman, in deep chagrin. "The clever young rascal who looted my outpost last night?"

"The same."

Several of C Company's enlisted men were within hearing.

Now, from one of these men, came the heartfelt utterance:

"Hang that kid Overton!"

"Terry's just as bad," growled another C Company soldier.

"Cortland," remarked C Company's chopfallen commander, "I congratulate you on having two fine young soldiers in your company."

"I surely have," nodded Captain Cortland. "I have already informed Overton and Terry of my estimate of their abilities."

Twenty minutes later the reunited companies of wearied officers and men slept side by side under the stars of the Colorado sky.

CHAPTER XI

THAT C COMPANY CORPORAL EATS CROW

"COMPANY, halt!"

Then, just a little later:

"C Company, halt!"

The long, dusty line of khaki-clad soldiers, at the word, dropped out of ranks, finding seats on the ground near where they had left the ranks.

Behind the men, now stopped, the wagon train came up and also halted.

Not far from the head of the line that morning stood the log cabin of the old-time hunter.

Though the military did not suspect it, a sharp pair of old eyes peered out through a chink in the cabin wall.

Then the cabin door opened, the old-time hunter sauntering slowly forth.

At sight of him Corporal Raynes, C Company, tried to shrink into smaller space than he had ever succeeded in occupying before.

"Which side won the tom-fool match?" inquired the aged hunter of a pleasant-faced young man on whose shoulders glistened the plain straps of a second lieutenant.

"B Company won the miniature manœuvres

by capturing C Company, if that's what you mean, sir," replied Lieutenant Dick Prescott pleasantly.

"B Company?" cried the old man almost indignantly. "Why, B Company stood for the Japs, didn't they?"

"Not that I've heard, sir," answered Prescott. "B Company and C Company represented two forces that were supposed to be hostile to each other. Neither side was designated by the name of any country."

"Why, that's dinged strange!" uttered the old hunter. "A lot of your camp wagons went by yesterday, and there was a feller from one of 'em, who told me he belonged to C Company, and that C Company was supposed to be the Americans, and B Company was the Japs. Now, I've always hated the Japs!"

"Did you ever see any Japanese, sir?" asked Lieutenant Prescott.

"Nope, young man; but what's that got to do with hating 'em? Well, as I was saying, that C Company feller on one of the wagons told me about B Company being the Japs, and he asked me if I would like to help along the licking of B Company. So I done the best I could."

"By sending two young B Company soldiers across the wilderness, to that elevation over

yonder?" inquired Captain Cortland, who had heard the conversation.

"The C Company feller told me that it would help lick the company that was standing for the Japs," explained the old man, his face an interesting study as he gazed from one officer's face to another.

Captain Freeman had not yet heard the story of how Hal and Noll had come to be in his camp at dark. He had been denied that knowledge by the laughing officers of B Company. But Freeman had been near enough to hear the hunter's explanation, and now C Company's commander thought he saw a whole lot of sudden light.

"Pass the word for Corporal Raynes!" he shouted.

Raynes heard, and shivered. Yet he was a soldier; there was but one thing to do. Quaking in his restored shoes, Raynes rose and marched briskly forward, halting and saluting before his captain.

"Is this the man who was on one of the wagons, and who told you to send two B Company men hiking across a wilderness of rock?" asked Captain Freeman.

"That's the very man," declared the old hunter.

Hal and Noll had been looking on from a

little distance. Now they caught Captain Cortland's signal to come up, and obeyed.

"Are these the two young men you sent, sir, on that wild-goose chase off over the rocks?" asked Captain Freeman, pointing over towards the bunkies.

"They sure are," nodded the hunter.

Captain Freeman turned, fixing the quaking Raynes with a glance that brought the victim scant comfort.

"Corporal Raynes, you were despoiled by Overton while on outpost night before last. Then, yesterday afternoon, you fixed up a practical joke on Overton and Terry in order to pay Overton back for his conduct to you the night before?" queried Captain Freeman.

"Yes, sir," admitted Raynes, feeling as though he would like to sink about a mile into the ground.

"Corporal Raynes," continued his captain, half scathingly and half quizzically, "you have proved a most valuable man to your company during this period of field duty. First, while on outpost duty, you allow yourself to be despoiled of your rifle, shoes and canteen. Then, in your humorous efforts to get even, you perpetrate a near-joke that sends the enemy's two best scouts where they will be right on hand to learn our plans and betray us to the enemy. Cor-

poral Raynes, you have covered yourself with glory indeed! Return to your company."

Like wildfire the story spread down the line. Raynes had to endure jeering looks from nearly two hundred men.

"Ain't it fearful how these kids gain glory from the very things that other folks do to smash 'em?" demanded Private Bill Hooper hoarsely in the ear of Private Dowley.

"It's a long lane of luck that has no turning," growled Dowley.

"After what I've seen of their luck, I'm almost afraid to put up any job against 'em," confessed Hooper.

"You never did have much sand or wit, I reckon," snarled Dowley.

"Are you still going to try to bring the kid soldiers to disgrace?" asked Hooper in an eager undertone.

"If I do, I don't believe you'll be much help."

"But I'd like to know——"

"Bill Hooper, if I need your help in anything I'll be sure to let you know."

"Now, Dowley, you needn't be so warm-tongued about it," urged Hooper. "Of course, if there's any safe scheme for fixing the records of these kids, I'm plumb crazy to have a hand in it, and that you know, Dowley."

"Did the last thing we put up—spoiling Kid

Overton's rifle—get traced back to us?" demanded Dowley.

"Now, that scheme didn't work much trouble to the kid," complained Hooper. "He was in bad for half a day, then got a new rifle, and has been receiving bouquets ever since."

"You wait—watch and listen," urged Dowley. "You won't be very much older when you'll hear something drop that'll fix Overton if he happens to be around."

"I wish you'd tell me," half whined Bill Hooper.

"I will, if I want your help," remarked Dowley dryly.

"Well, so long as the kid is chased out of this regiment, I don't care who does it."

"Fall in!" rang down the line.

* * * * * * * *

"I'm glad I know who put up that job on us," laughed Private Overton, as he stepped to his place in ranks.

"But I wonder how it feels to be Corporal Raynes just now?" hinted Private Terry facetiously.

"I hope he won't get reduced to the ranks as a consequence," observed Hal.

"That would be rather rough. But I don't believe Captain Freeman will do anything like that."

Just before noon the troops were halted, then marched, by companies, into a field. The order to pitch camp was given.

It was really too bad, but one of the wagons drove up and the men on it began to unload bear carcasses. All this bear meat was dumped before B Company's line. C Company men tried not to look in that direction at all, for C Company's share in the bear meat was to be —none.

Early that morning Captain Cortland had sent the wagon and men to recover the bear carcasses from the cave. The bears had been promptly "skinned" and dressed before loading them into the wagon.

From still another wagon sounded the whines of the five cubs. These were to be taken back to Fort Clowdry, there to be fattened and served at the coming Thanksgiving or Christmas dinner of B Company's men. A few months later these cubs would be "a good size for killing."

"To the victors belong the spoils." The two older bears had been killed as already related, and the cubs found by B Company scouts within C Company's "territory."

Out were tumbled the Army cookstoves. Men of B Company cut up the meat. Soon the odor of baking and roasting meats was on the air.

Other willing helpers to the cook were trimming off pieces of meat for broiling.

It was torment to hungry C Company men to smell the appetizing odors and to meet the grins with which B Company men favored them.

B Company must wait a while for its dinner, but was willing. The men of C Company, to stop, as far as possible, the pangs of longing and the watering of mouths, fell to at once to cook their own monotonous bacon.

"See here, Freeman, there's going to be an abundance of bear meat," remarked Captain Cortland, going over to his fellow company commander. "Your men may as well have some of it."

"Not under the circumstances under which the meat was obtained," replied Captain Freeman firmly. "Let the men of my company realize that they were disgracefully worsted, and that they have no cause for complaint."

So the men of one company sat down to a meal of hard tack, bacon and coffee, while B Company men waited for a better feast.

At last B's spread was ready.

"My man," said Captain Cortland to his dog-robber, "cut off some nice pieces of bear meat and take them over to the officers of C Company with my compliments."

But the dog-robber soon returned, bearing the platter on which the meat still lay.

"Captain Freeman's compliments, sir, but he says that the officers of C Company will endure a deserved disappointment along with their men."

Ere B Company's feast ended a commotion started that appeared to come from behind C Company's street.

Hal, dropping his ration plate to the ground, leaped up.

"Look, Noll!" he called laughingly. "Corporal Raynes is certainly 'getting his.' Wow! Look at the fracas!"

As a matter of fact, Raynes, at this moment, was being made the recipient of most unwelcome attentions.

He was being tossed in a blanket.

This is the most emphatic and picturesque way that soldiers have of displaying their displeasure against a man. It is a torment that is also inflicted on any soldier who is accused of being "too fresh."

Eight soldiers had hold of an ordinary army blanket, holding to it by the edges.

Several other soldiers had started in pursuit of Corporal Raynes. Though that non-com ran for all he was worth, he was captured, overpowered and dragged to the blanket.

Willing hands caught him up, throwing him into the slack of the blanket.

"Heave her, boys!"

Instantly, before Raynes could scramble to his feet and escape, the slack blanket was hauled taut.

Up into the air some four feet shot Corporal Raynes's sprawling figure.

Down he came again, into the slack, but just as promptly he was tossed again. This time the victim went up more than five feet into the air.

"Stop it!" gasped the victim from up in the air.

But no one was in a mood to stop it. Higher and higher shot the body of the unpopular corporal, until he was going up ten feet or more at nearly every toss.

It is a most ludicrous punishment to look at, but the victim of this strenuous prank feels that it is more than ridicule. He is always certain that an outrage is being carried on against him.

"Sto-o-op it!" gasped Raynes weakly.

Under the merciless tossing and consequent jolting nearly all the breath had left his body.

"Give him a few more tastes," advised three or four of C Company's men who stood in the front rank of those looking on.

Of course it was a breach of discipline, in a

way, for privates to toss a non-commissioned officer, but neither Captain Freeman nor either of his lieutenants interfered. The non-com is not always safe, by any means, from blanket tossing.

At last, however, the blanket was dropped to the ground, and Corporal Raynes, breathless and very red-faced, was allowed to roll off the woolen surface.

As the corporal lay on the ground one of the men voiced the feeling of all his comrades in C Company by muttering grimly:

"Put up jobs that supply B's men with fresh meat and leave us out, will you?"

CHAPTER XII

THE CALL TO DEADLY WORK

FOR the next three days the men were to remain at the present camp.

Instruction in the erecting of temporary field fortifications was to follow.

But Hal and Noll missed the first afternoon of this work, for they were sent over to Mason City as orderlies to Lieutenant Prescott, who, as acting commissary officer to the reunited companies, went to buy fresh foodstuffs.

Two wagons were also despatched, the young lieutenant riding with the driver on one of the wagons, while the soldier boys rode on the other wagon.

Mason City nestled in among the mountains in what was considered one of the best health sections of Colorado. The "city" would have been termed a village back in the east. It contained four hotels, two sanitariums, a small theatre and other public buildings. It was to this town that many eastern consumptives came.

The native population of the town was less than a thousand souls. Consumptives and other travelers added a usual average of about eighteen hundred more people.

The streets were lively with people when the two wagons drove into the town.

"You men may just as well enjoy yourselves for a couple of hours, for I shall be busy in looking through the markets," announced Lieutenant Prescott, as the soldier boys climbed down from their wagon. "Report to me at the Mason House at six sharp. Remember, won't you, that's it a soldier's business to be punctual to the fraction of a minute?"

"Yes, sir," replied Hal Overton, as the soldier boys saluted.

Lieutenant Prescott strode off down the street, a splendidly military figure in his officer's khaki uniform which, despite the hardships of the last days, he had kept almost immaculate.

"A mighty fine young officer," murmured Noll, gazing admiringly after the lieutenant.

"One of the best that they turn out of West Point, I reckon," replied Private Overton.

Then the two young privates devoted themselves to sight-seeing.

Punctually at the moment, however, both were in the lobby at the Mason House.

Lieutenant Prescott stepped in at the same moment.

"I'll register you here for a room to-night, men," he said, returning their salutes. "You will also have your evening meal in the dining

room. I shall not need your services until morning. Report to me at this spot at 8.30 to-morrow morning."

"Very good, sir," replied both soldier boys, once more saluting.

"Say, a hotel meal will seem like a real luxury —what?" breathed Hal.

"I wonder if it's ready?" murmured Noll.

"We'll find out."

The dining room was open. After going to the wash room, and making themselves as presentable as possible, the two young soldiers stepped into the dining room, the head waiter showing them to seats.

"There's the lieutenant over there at another table," whispered Noll.

"I guess he's as glad as we are to have a civilized meal again. But has it struck you, Noll, that the government does things in pretty good shape when it pays for putting up two private soldiers at a fine hotel like this?"

What neither soldier boy suspected was that Lieutenant Prescott was paying the bill for them out of his own pocket—this as a silent remembrance of their work in bringing victory to B Company.

By the time that the meal was nearly over the soldier boys observed that a man who looked as if he might be a native of Mason City had seated

himself at the same table with Lieutenant Prescott, and was engaged in earnest, low-voiced conversation with that young officer.

Soon after a waiter came to the table where Hal and Noll sat.

"The lieutenant wants to speak with you as soon as you have finished," announced the waiter. "Don't go to him until you're through eating, though."

Noll finished his last few bites of dessert, Hal his coffee. Then both young men rose, quietly crossing the dining room. The soldier boys, as they moved with erect carriage and easy motion, were full of a soldierly grace of appearance that they did not begin to suspect.

Nor did they imagine that strangers in the hotel dining room were paying any heed to them until they heard a man's voice say approvingly:

"Regulars."

"Yes; they're the real thing," agreed another male voice. "You'll know a regular wherever you see one. The men of the regular Army can't be beat."

"You sent for us, sir?" asked Hal, pausing beside the lieutenant's table and saluting.

"Yes," nodded Prescott. "Follow me from the dining room. I have something to say to you."

Prescott and the stranger passed out ahead.

Hal and Noll kept in their wake, about fifteen feet to the rear. Lieutenant Prescott and the stranger entered an elevator, the soldier boys following. The young officer led the way to his room.

"Now, then," resumed Prescott, wheeling about on the soldier boys, "I have had a very peculiar request made to me to-night—by this gentleman."

The stranger nodded.

"Mason City," continued the lieutenant, "is usually a very orderly place. There are only two policemen here—a night and a day officer. Besides, there is one peace officer—Deputy Sheriff Coates. Now, it happens that Coates is ill in bed, and his physician absolutely forbids him to leave his bed inside of a week."

"That's right," nodded the stranger.

"And the policemen are needed on the street. Besides, I am informed that the two local policemen are neither of them quite the sort of men who are fitted for some work that has come up."

"Also quite right," nodded the stranger.

"Therefore," went on the young lieutenant, "Deputy Sheriff Coates, hearing that soldiers are in town, has sent to me asking my help in arresting one of the most dangerous characters at present at liberty anywhere in the United

States. Now, if I am to undertake this work, I must have assistance. The question comes, men——"

Lieutenant Prescott paused, scrutinizing keenly the faces of the soldier boys.

"Are you men ready to aid me in arresting this desperate character, who is as deadly as a rattler, and always ready to turn himself loose with a pair of guns?"

"I am very sorry, sir," replied Hal, saluting, "that the lieutenant should feel it at all necessary to ask the question."

"I am obliged to ask you," answered Prescott, "and also to inform you that you are both at liberty to refuse, for this is not legally the duty of a soldier under the circumstances. You may refuse without subjecting yourselves to criticism."

"But we have no thought of refusing, sir," Hal answered, not even considering it necessary to glance at his bunkie. "We'll follow the lieutenant anywhere, and do anything that he directs."

"But, my men, you and I may all three of us be killed in this enterprise."

"Fearful, sir!" replied Noll half dryly. "Yet I've always supposed it part of a soldier's duty to be killed at need."

"In the discharge of military duties, yes,"

agreed Lieutenant Prescott. "But this is not military duty in any sense. If you go into it you must understand that you are acting voluntarily, to aid the civil authorities of this state and county."

"May I ask a question, sir?"—from Hal.

"Certainly," replied the young officer.

"You are proposing to risk your life, aren't you, sir?"

"Yes."

"Then we'll take the same risk, sir. We don't need to ask anything more. Lead us where you wish, and into what you please, sir."

"Thank you, men," acknowledged Lieutenant Prescott heartily. Then, turning to the stranger, he added:

"I told you I didn't think I was mistaken in these men."

"You certainly are not," agreed the stranger.

"Now, for the next step, I must wire the regimental commander, Colonel North, asking his permission that these men and myself engage in the enterprise. I anticipate the colonel's consent. Therefore, as soon as I have sent the telegram, sir, you may lead us to the house of Coates."

Lieutenant Prescott then left the room.

"I suppose you boys wonder who I am?" smiled the stranger.

"Thank you, sir," Hal replied quietly. "When the lieutenant wants us to know he'll tell us. No offense intended, sir."

"Nor any taken," replied the stranger, with a laugh. "You regulars surely do go along, just sticking to orders, and not caring for anything outside of orders."

Second Lieutenant Prescott soon returned to the room.

"I've sent my wire, Mr. Dent. Now we are at your disposal. Lead the way, sir."

As the soldier boys followed their officer, a dozen feet to the rear, from the hotel, they certainly felt far more curiosity than they would have admitted to any one else.

CHAPTER XIII

THE APPOINTMENT WITH SUPREME DANGER

"YOU think you can manage it?" asked Deputy Sheriff Coates anxiously, after a long talk by the side of the sick bed.

"I am sure we can," nodded Lieutenant Richard Prescott cheerily.

"I hate to ask such favor of you," went on Coates in a tone of real regret. "But Jack Blick simply has to be arrested, and there doesn't seem any other way."

"Don't worry any more about it, Mr. Coates," urged the young lieutenant.

It seemed odd to see one as young as Prescott using this soothing tone to the weather-tanned, middle-aged peace officer who, for a score of years, had been known as a terror to evil-doers. But Coates was flat on his back now, and there was a man to be captured who was known as one of the most dangerous men in the country.

During the conversation Hal and Noll had remained seated at some distance from the bed. The soldier boys had listened, but had said nothing. Nor had Dent, who turned out to be the local postmaster, said much, either.

"Blick is just waiting for a letter that holds money to take him somewhere else," Coates continued, plucking at the bed clothes. "If he gets that letter in the morning, he'll be out of sight and away before I can get help here. As I've told you, the stage comes here only twice a week, and it is out of the question to get real help through in case Blick makes his last trip to the post office to-morrow morning. If he gets a letter then, and finds the expected funds in it, it's my belief that he'll be on his way among the hills five minutes afterwards. That is, of course, Lieutenant, if you're not there to stop him."

"If he appears and is recognized, we'll stop him," smiled Lieutenant Prescott with the confidence of a trained man who cannot admit defeat.

"But be mighty sure you get the drop on Jack Blick, Lieutenant. If you soldiers make the slightest blunder after Blick knows you're there for him, he'll drill all three of you. If you once let Blick get a gun out of his pocket then one or two of you will die—sure. The fellow is as quick as lightning, and he always shoots to kill at the first shot!"

"I have heard of that kind of man before," replied Mr. Prescott composedly.

"Don't you doubt that they exist, either, Lieu-

tenant," warned the deputy sheriff earnestly. "Don't forget, either, that Jack Blick is the most dangerous man of that type."

"What a pity you don't know where Blick is staying," sighed Lieutenant Prescott regretfully. "It would be much more to my liking to turn him out of bed in the middle of the night."

"None of us have been able to find the least trace of his stopping place," put in Postmaster Dent. "Not that we haven't tried. Wherever Blick's hiding place is, it's a secure one."

The plans for the attempt at capture were then made and fully discussed until every one present understood fully.

Jack Blick, "wanted" for two killings and half a dozen train and stage holds-ups, was here in Mason City in disguise. He had always been smooth faced, but now he wore a heavy beard. He had made other alterations in his appearance. At the post office he inquired for letters for Arthur Dade. As a part of his disguise Blick pretended to be a consumptive, and on even rather warm days, he appeared in a light topcoat. This was the information that Coates gave Lieutenant Prescott.

"That's so he can carry revolvers in either side pocket; don't forget that," urged the deputy sheriff. "Watch Blick's hands when he takes 'em out of his pockets."

Blick's identity had been learned from the police of San Francisco. In that latter city Blick's sister lived. It was believed that she might correspond with her brother, and so the police of San Francisco had arranged with the local post office people for a chance to inspect the address of every letter that Juliette Blick mailed. These addresses had been run down, and the one at Mason City had proved to be the correct one for her brother.

"I am afraid you have tired yourself out, Mr. Coates," suggested Prescott, rising. "As we now know all that can help us, I propose to leave after sending your nurse in to you."

"My nurse?" cried the deputy, almost resentfully. "Me, under a nurse's care, when there's a job at hand like catching Jack Blick!"

"We'll do our very best, sir, to take your place," promised Lieutenant Prescott. Then a new thought coming to him, he added:

"I think, Mr. Coates, perhaps we had better wait until Mr. Dent goes down to the Mason House to see whether there is an answer to the telegram I sent Colonel North. I may have to see you again, just for a moment."

Once outside the sick room, the three soldiers stepped into the little parlor of the house.

"As postmaster, Mr. Dent, you are well enough known to have no difficulty in getting

the hotel people to hand you any message that may have come for me."

Then Mr. Dent left them.

"Seat yourselves, men," urged Lieutenant Prescott, himself dropping into a chair. "Now, I think that, with three of us, we're going to have a rather easy time to-morrow if Blick really shows up at the post office. Of course, now that we've undertaken this thing, we simply can't allow ourselves to make any flukes."

"As I understand it, sir," smiled Hal Overton, "any mistakes that any of us make will form the basis of the undertaker's bill to our families at home."

"That's the best possible way of stating the case," laughed the young lieutenant lightly. "Just for the sake of being able to remain in the good old service we've got to avoid making any bad breaks while Blick is at hand."

Thirty minutes went by ere the postmaster of Mason City returned.

"Had to wait. Message just came. I brought it at once," explained Dent, whose breathing showed that he had hurried.

Lieutenant Prescott took the little yellow envelope, breaking it open.

"Pardon me for reading it," he said.

Then a smile broke over his features.

"It's O. K.," he announced, dropping the pa-

per to his lap. Then he picked it up again, saying:

"Listen!"

This was the dispatch that he read, addressed to himself and signed by Colonel North:

"Permission granted to yourself and Privates Overton and Terry to make arrest if possible, but only after all three have been legally sworn in as special deputy sheriffs of the county. Obey and submit to the civil authorities in every way."

"Hurrah!" Hal could not restrain himself from saying.

"What a bully old colonel commands 'Ours,'" breathed Noll Terry.

"Ours" is the term given his regiment by every soldier, whether officer or enlisted man.

"I'm glad to see, men, that you're pleased. Now, as I thought might be possible when leaving Mr. Coates, we shall have to see him again for just a moment."

"To be sworn in as special deputies?" inquired Postmaster Dent.

"Exactly," nodded Lieutenant Prescott.

They were soon again at the sick man's bedside, the young officer explaining their errand.

"Hold up your hands, all three of you," directed Deputy Coates.

Then and there he swore them in formally

as special deputy sheriffs in the service of the county.

"Dent, go to the third drawer in that cabinet and take out three badges, will you?" asked Mr. Coates.

"These badges will be in the best place if we pin them to our flannel shirts, and then button our blouses over them," suggested Prescott, setting the example.

"I'll go out ahead of you now," proposed the postmaster. "Arrange to be in the little alleyway back of the post office at half past six in the morning."

"Six thirty to the minute," Lieutenant Prescott promised.

Once outside, the lieutenant told the bunkies to return to the hotel together. Then he left them.

Just on the dot of 6.30 the next morning Lieutenant Prescott and his two soldier boys were at the meeting place.

Postmaster Dent was ahead of them, and quickly admitted them through the rear door of the post office building.

"Now, we've just time to hurry into readiness," whispered Dent, rubbing his hands. "The office opens sharp at seven!"

CHAPTER XIV

MEETING BLICK IN EARNEST

"ANY mail for Sarah J. Campbell?"

"I'll see, ma'am."

"Be quick, boy. I'm in a dreadful hurry."

Noll turned away from the window to consult a frame of boxes that were alphabetically arranged.

"Maria A. Bampole, did you say, ma'am?" sounded young Terry's voice, his face just out of sight.

"No; I didn't," snapped the woman. "Sarah J. Campbell, blockhead!"

" 'Scuse me, ma'am," returned Noll politely, though heavily.

The impatient woman could hear him slowly sorting over letters..

"Nothing for Blockhead," he announced slowly, as though talking caused him pain.

The woman threw up her hands in huge disgust.

"Sarah J. Campbell!" she insisted snappishly.

"Oh, 'scuse me, ma'am. I thought you said Blockhead."

"So I did, dunce, but I was calling you that!"

"But, you see, ma'am," drawled Noll, exasperatingly, "I ain't looking for any mail."

"Then you'd better!" warned the woman angrily. "And look for Sarah J. Campbell. Be lively about it, too."

Noll ran through the letters and postcards in Box C with provoking deliberation. Then he announced, while the woman drummed impatiently on the window ledge:

"Here's a postal from the Mason City Laundry, stating that your wash, this week, will be delivered only on payment of your account."

"Gimme that card," screamed Miss Campbell. "I didn't ask you to read it, booby!"

"And here's another, from Medella, dealer in false hair at Denver, stating that your order will be shipped on the second of next month, and——"

People waiting in the line behind began to titter, while Miss Campbell's face turned scarlet.

"Gimme my mail, stupid!" commanded Miss Campbell irately. "And I'll complain to the postmaster about your impudence."

Noll Terry gazed at the woman with an expression of sadly wounded innocence.

" 'Scuse me, marm, and please don't blab to the P. M. This is my first day here. I'm new and green, yes, marm, but I'm trying to be as obliging as I can."

"Humph!" muttered the woman. Gathering her post cards, she fled.

Lieutenant Prescott, holding one hand over his mouth, used the other to beckon as soon as he could catch Noll's eye.

Noll went over to him, saluting, out of sight of any one at the post office window.

"Cut out some of this comedy, Terry," begged the lieutenant in a whisper, "or I shall laugh outright and betray myself."

Noll once more saluted gravely, then returned to his post at the general delivery window.

All traces of the military had left Noll Terry's appearance. His khaki uniform was hidden under the jumper and overalls that Postmaster Dent had loaned him. Even his erect carriage had vanished. Noll now looked as though he had been round-shouldered from the cradle. His crisp speaking tone had given way to a drawl, and his look was stupid.

The three soldiers were alone in the general delivery room, Noll the only one of them at any time visible.

Toward the front of the room was a door opening out on the lobby of the post office. Behind this stood Lieutenant Prescott in uniform, but without his sword. Over the right hip dangled a holster in which lay a service revolver, ready for instant work.

Further down the general delivery room, on the other side of the window, was a door opening also into the lobby. Behind this Private Hal Overton, also in uniform, was stationed. He, too, wore a revolver in holster over his right hip, for the bunkies, when sent into town as orderlies, had been armed with revolvers, as is the custom in the case of officers' orderlies in the field.

Noll's revolver lay on a little shelf out of sight under the window ledge.

Over two hours had dragged by. There could be no telling, of course, at what time Blick would appear, even if he came at all.

It was not long ere Noll Terry forgot Lieutenant Prescott's warning, and again started in to have more fun with the people before the window.

This time, however, he took great pains not to let the young lieutenant catch his eye.

Then, of a sudden came a jolt that would have made a less self-possessed young man topple over.

A mild-eyed man of forty took his place before the window. Noll barely glanced at the fellow until the latter inquired in a soft voice that was almost effeminate:

"Any mail for Arthur Dade?"

But Private Terry never turned a hair.

Lieutenant Prescott and Private Thomas Dance Into the Play.

This man was bearded and surely must be Jack Blick, he of the deadly habits.

"What name did you say?" queried Noll slowly.

Lieutenant Prescott and Hal Overton got out their revolvers in a jiffy, each standing with hand on the knob of a door.

"Arthur Dade," repeated the mild-voiced one.

"Bade?" blundered Noll purposely. "Will you please spell it?"

"D-a-d-e, Dade, Arthur Dade," said the man before the window.

"I'll see," nodded Noll coolly. He stepped back, running through the letters in the D box. There was a letter there, as Noll Terry knew well enough. It had come in the mail that morning, and was postmarked at San Francisco.

Presently Noll came back into sight with the letter, holding it out with his left hand, while, with his right, he leaned over to replace the other letters in D box.

"Can you reach it?" invited Noll.

The man who had given the name of Dade made the effort to reach the letter, which was just what Noll was trying to make him do. That move would keep one of the desperate fellow's hands away from his weapons for a second or two.

Two doors opened like a flash. Lieutenant

Prescott and Private Overton were darting on tip-toe into the expected fray.

"Blick, get your hands up—high! Get 'em up quick, or take lead!" ordered Lieutenant Prescott imperiously. "Don't try any tricks!"

Reaching his man at a bound, the young Army officer thrust his revolver squarely up against the fellow's breast.

"Great Scott, mister, don't shoot!" yelled the stranger in a quavering voice.

"Then up with your hands, Blick!"

As though in terror the stranger had sprung back two or three feet. This was done with the quickness of a wildcat.

As a part of the same movement the desperate man threw up one foot in a clever kick.

His heavy boot struck Lieutenant Prescott's right wrist with fearful force, sending the pistol flying and nearly breaking the young officer's wrist.

Private Hal Overton had started at the same instant, but he had further to go.

Blick's right hand dropped in a twinkling to the right side pocket of his top-coat.

Both hands now flashed into sight, each holding a revolver.

Coolly enough now, but with incredible swiftness, the stranger aimed his left-hand weapon at Lieutenant Prescott.

At the same instant Soldier Hal leaped from behind, wrapping both his arms around Blick's neck and dragging him swiftly backward.

Bang!

The revolver was discharged, but the bullet, owing to Blick's going over backward, struck a wall.

Surely Blick must have possessed all the strength and ferocity of the mountain lion.

Though Hal Overton thought he had his man headed for a crashing fall to the floor, the fellow managed to squirm out of that clutch as though by magic.

Then Soldier Hal found himself staring into both muzzles of the desperate fellow's pistols.

Hal knew it was time for him to shoot, but found he was not as swift at the game as was the justly dreaded Blick.

Bang-bang! sounded two loud reports. Two streams of fire flashed before Private Overton's eyes.

Two bullets all but grazed the soldier boy's head on either side.

He would have been killed instantly but for Lieutenant Prescott.

That young officer, afraid to fire for fear of hitting his own man, had jumped into the fray despite the fact that his right wrist was all but useless.

With one flashing movement Prescott had recovered his revolver with his left hand.

It was his sudden football tackle, learned on the gridiron at West Point, that had seized Blick and spoiled the latter's aim.

Now, all three went down in an ugly clinch. Officer and soldier were fighting to pin Blick's arms to his side and thus render him helpless.

Bang! bang!

Bang! bang! bang!

To Blick it was little concern whether he lived or died. If he must go under in the fight he intended at least to do all the mischief he could.

So he fired, even while Prescott and Hal were fighting desperately to pin his arms and spoil his aim.

Fortunately, none of these five bullets did any harm.

But the three locked together were fighting like panthers.

If Blick could but wriggle out of the clutch long enough to get either hand free, he would stand a very good chance to kill one or both of his assailants.

Neither the lieutenant or the soldier boy dared fire in this scrambling clinch.

Each feared to kill the other.

Then Blick briefly got an arm free.

Bang! bang!

CHAPTER XV

THE BATTLE OF THEIR LIVES

AT the first sign of trouble the few people in the post office lobby had devoted their entire energies to getting away.

Nor did any of the postal employés appear to offer aid.

They had little stomach for such a deadly affair as this was certain to be.

And Noll?

At the first note of Prescott's voice, as the lieutenant leaped at Blick, Private Terry had dropped below the level of the window ledge.

There his hand closed on his revolver.

With this in hand, he bounded for the door that the young Army officer had left open.

But all this took time, and what was going on in the post office lobby outside seemed to take place in split seconds.

Noll had just bounded out in sight of the scramble for life as Blick fired the last two shots.

Even as the wretch pressed the trigger, however, Hal Overton took another quick grip on the fellow's wrist.

Thus was the soldier boy's life saved for the instant.

But the weapons that Blick carried were automatic revolvers, each holding nine cartridges. The scoundrel therefore held several lives in his hands if he could only get a chance to free his wrists sufficiently.

Still the three fought, rolled and scrambled across the floor.

Now, Private Noll Terry was hovering over the combatants.

At first the strenuous trio moved with such bewildering speed and were so hopelessly mixed up that Noll actually wondered what he could do.

At last he saw his chance and tried for it.

Whack!

Clubbing his revolver, Soldier Noll brought the butt of the weapon down with fearful force —on some one's head.

By sheer good luck it proved to be Blick's head.

Almost completely stunned, Blick rolled over on his back, Lieutenant Prescott bearing down on one of Blick's arms, while Hal Overton held the other.

Leaping around, Noll thrust the muzzle of his own revolver into Blick's mouth.

"Shall I pull the trigger, sir?" demanded Noll coolly.

"No," responded Lieutenant Prescott with

equal coolness. "I think we have the rascal now."

Jack Blick came back to consciousness to see his weapons go spinning across the floor in different directions.

"Now, if he makes any further efforts at trouble, Terry, just pull the trigger," directed Lieutenant Prescott. "Blick, put your hands in front of you, over your stomach."

Sullenly the fellow obeyed. Lieutenant Prescott snapped a pair of handcuffs over the fellow's wrists.

"Now, you'll keep without spoiling," predicted the young Army officer, leaping to his feet. "Pull him up, men."

Though his right wrist was swelling, Prescott employed that hand to thrust his revolver back into the holster over his hip.

Hal and Noll dragged Blick to his feet.

Like a flash the scoundrel darted away from them. No one had told the Army people that Jack Blick was an expert at throwing off shackles. But now Blick squeezed his wrists and hands through the steel bracelets before his would-be captors could realize it.

As part of the same movement he raced to where one of his revolvers lay.

Stooping and picking it up, Blick wheeled like a streak of light on his knees.

But Soldier Hal had his own weapon up. He fired, coolly—for life.

The bullet drilled through Blick's wrist, forcing him to drop the revolver like hot iron.

The fellow's left hand, however, picked up the weapon.

Bang!

Once more Blick dropped his weapon, for Noll Terry had fired, shattering the fellow's left forearm.

Now, apparently, Jack Blick was out of the fighting game.

But Lieutenant Prescott, who had just snatched his pistol from its holster, dashed forward, holding the muzzle of his weapon almost in the fellow's face.

"Stop all nonsense, now, my man, or we'll kill you without a word of parley," warned the young officer in an even but deadly and convincing tone of voice.

Hal slipped a cord from his pocket, knotted a noose, and dropped it over the fellow's head, drawing the noose tight.

"I think we can hold him this way, sir," Hal suggested to the lieutenant.

"Yes; get behind him, Overton. Let him walk slowly, but don't stand for any bolt. You get behind Blick, too, Terry, and hold your revolver on his back. If he tries to bolt, or makes a

single hostile sign, shoot to kill. We're through with anything like nonsense."

With his uninjured left hand Lieutenant Prescott helped the prisoner to the floor.

"Now march, my man," ordered the officer. "Out into the street. Don't try to hurry, either."

Thus they proceeded to the street, Lieutenant Prescott with drawn revolver in his left hand keeping just behind the soldier boys, and with ever an eye of watchfulness on the prisoner's steps.

Only six doors below stood the police station. Thither they conducted Blick, and the solitary day policeman of the little town, seeing the crowd that had formed and followed, came rushing to the scene.

"Get a doctor first," Lieutenant Prescott ordered, when they had Jack Blick safely inside the station house.

A physician was on hand inside of two minutes. He washed and dressed the rascal's wounds.

Then a blacksmith was sent for, and others brought portable forge and bellows. An "Oregon boot" was shaped and riveted to Blick's lower left leg, and a red-hot piece of iron welded on over the rivets.

This "Oregon boot" is a famous device in

some western states. It is simply an extremely heavy cylinder of iron. The prisoner who wears it can barely draw his left foot along. Running would be out of the quesetion. Nor, when the blacksmith's job was done, could Blick, even had he been provided with ordinary tools, have succeeded in getting that "boot" off his leg in less than four hours.

The day policeman of Mason City, who was also chief of the "force," swore in six armed citizens as special policemen. They were to watch the prisoner day and night until other officers arrived to take him away to stand trial.

"I guess you'll keep now, won't you, Blick?" asked Lieutenant Prescott, smiling in at the prisoner, who lay on a bench behind the barred door of a cell, his guards just outside.

"You think you got me, don't you?" jeered Jack Blick harshly.

"I think we did," the young Army officer agreed, smilingly. "Have you any doubts, my man."

"It took three of you to do it, and if there'd been only two of you, I'd have gotten away," snarled the desperado.

"I'll admit that that is probably true," assented Prescott, as smiling as ever. "Blick, you're a nervy, deadly man. But fellows of your class always ought to bear in mind that the

community is bigger than any one man can possibly be. You're caged now, and you have always been bound to be, sooner or later."

"Perhaps you feel pretty big now?" sneered Jack Blick.

"I can't say that I do," rejoined Lieutenant Prescott coolly. "As nearly as I can judge, I feel just about as big as I did yesterday, or the day before. How about you, men?"

"I know very well that I felt a lot bigger the day I first stepped into the uniform than I do now," laughed Soldier Hal.

"I always feel largest on pay-day," smiled Private Noll Terry. "And this is a long way from pay-day."

"I've got friends in this town. Friends of my own kind," broke in Jack Blick harshly. "Don't forget that."

"Why?" queried Lieutenant Dick Prescott.

"Because," snarled Blick, showing his teeth, "you've been marked by my friends already. You won't get out of town and back to camp alive!"

CHAPTER XVI

CAPTAIN CORTLAND "MAKES A SPEECH"

"YOU heard Blick's declaration, didn't you?" questioned Lieutenant Prescott, with a smile.

He had halted on the sidewalk and was gazing at his soldier boys.

"That we wouldn't get out of town alive, sir?" asked Hal Overton.

"Yes. Well, men, we don't deserve to, either, if we leave our comrades out in camp deprived of fresh food much longer. It was Captain Cortland's expectation that we would start back by noon to-day, and now it's ten in the morning, with four hours or more of real work ahead of us, so we had better walk briskly to the market."

An officer does not, except in rare instances that call for it, walk with his men. He walks either ahead or behind them. This is not because of any contempt or lack of respect, even, for the men; it is a rule of discipline and is followed for discipline's sake.

There was soon an abundance of hard work to be done. Liberal supplies of fresh meat were bought, and a considerable variety of groceries

and fresh and canned vegetables, for Uncle Sam's soldiers live well.

Hal and Noll soon discovered that they had not been brought along as ornaments. They had their hands full of work.

Then, at last, Lieutenant Prescott sent Hal as messenger to summon the drivers to bring the wagons over to pick up the supplies.

Hard as all hands worked, it was well after one o'clock when the heavily laden wagons were finally gotten into shape and headed out of town.

"Overton?" called the lieutenant, just before the start.

"Yes, sir," Hal saluted.

"Have you seen any assassins lurking about?"

"No, sir."

Brief as his reply was, Hal stared at the young officer in some astonishment.

"Have you seen any assassins dogging our tracks, Terry?" was Lieutenant Prescott's next question.

"No, sir," came from saluting Noll.

"Then, continued the lieutenant, still speaking gravely, "I think that this small United States force may presume to start on its way. Of course, we may run into an ambush within the next thirteen minutes, but that would be a mean trick to play on a military party.

Though the young officer spoke with all gravity the soldier boys realized that he was wholly in jest. Reinforced now by the soldier drivers, who were also armed, this little party of trained men could put up a very ugly point at the first sign of need.

"And Prescott is just the sort of officer who'll always know how to lead men in a scrap," Hal thought admiringly.

"Shall we take our seats on one of the wagons, sir?" questioned Private Noll Terry.

"No; the wagons are too heavily laden as it is, and we've a rough road ahead. You'll march on foot. Take the road just ahead of the wagon train, but do not march under any restraint whatever. Walk just as much at ease as you can."

"Very good, sir."

Both soldier boys saluted and stepped ahead. The wagons followed at once. The first time that Hal and Noll glanced backward they saw that Lieutenant Prescott was also on foot, walking beside the second wagon.

"I don't believe Lieutenant Prescott ever gives an order that he wouldn't want to follow himself," murmured Hal.

"He's the real thing in the soldier line," responded Noll.

"I imagine that that other new West Pointer,

Holmes, is just as fine a soldier and officer," Hal continued.

"Very likely," admitted Noll. "I hear that they both came from the same home town, and that Prescott and Holmes were chums even years before they went to West Point."

To healthy young soldiers the walk, though over rough roads for most of the way, was no hardship. The wagon train reached camp later in the afternoon, just as the hard-working regulars in camp were coming back from drill in constructing trenches with revetments. These revetments are frames of one kind of wood or another, so built into the trench as to increase its stability greatly.

"You found that your task took longer than you expected, didn't you, Mr. Prescott?" was Captain Cortland's greeting when the young officer, saluting, came over to report.

"We would have gotten through much earlier, captain, but some of our time was taken up otherwise."

"How was that?"

"We accomplished an arrest for the county, at the request of the local deputy sheriff, sir."

Captain Cortland frowned slightly.

"Ordinarily, Mr. Prescott, that is no part of a soldier's business. But I feel certain that you must have had excellent reasons for acting be-

fore you had explained to me the circumstances in the matter?"

"Under the circumstances, sir, as I had the use of the telegraph, I found it much easier to communicate with Colonel North at Fort Clowdry."

"Oh, you did that, Mr. Prescott?"

"Yes, sir. I trust that was not the wrong course to take. I wanted to save time, and so used the wire straight to regimental headquarters."

"That was perfectly proper, Mr. Prescott," nodded Captain Cortland. "So you had Colonel North's permission to aid the county authorities?"

"Yes, sir; on condition that we acted as volunteer county peace officers, and not as soldiers. I have preserved Colonel North's despatch, sir. Here it is."

"Come over to the tent, Mr. Prescott. I am anxious to hear about the whole affair."

As Captain Cortland listened to the young officer's narration of what had taken place, he opened his eyes a bit wider.

"Mr. Prescott, Overton and Terry seem, in every way, to be proving themselves exceptionally fine young soldiers."

"They are all of that, sir," assented Lieutenant Prescott warmly.

"Sergeant Gray!" called the captain, thrusting his head outside the tent.

B Company's first sergeant stepped over, saluting.

"Sergeant, direct Overton and Terry to report here at once."

"Yes, sir."

Privates Hal and Noll appeared before the door of the tent, saluting respectfully.

"Come in, men," directed the captain, and the soldier boys entered the tent, standing at attention.

"Men, Lieutenant Prescott has just been telling me about the arrest in town. He speaks most highly of the conduct of both of you this morning."

Since this called for no reply, the two soldier boys merely continued to stand at attention.

"Now, I'm not going to commend you for the courage you displayed," went on B Company's captain. "It is a soldier's business to be brave, and he should never be commended for anything less than the most distinguished bravery. But what I am going to commend both of you for is in the way of qualities that not all soldiers show as successfully. The first is prompt obedience, and the second is good judgment under conditions of great danger and requiring the swiftest action. I do not know, men, that I can make

my commendation duly emphatic in any other way than by telling you that I am fully satisfied with both of you as soldiers of real merit, and that Lieutenant Prescott's report strengthens my conviction. That is all. You may go."

Again Hal and Noll saluted, then wheeled and stepped from the tent.

"That's a good deal better than a speech, isn't it?" murmured Noll when the bunkies were some distance from the officers' tent.

"Why, as coming from a captain, in praise of his men, that was really a speech, wasn't it?" asked Hal.

As neither of the young bunkies told the story in camp, it got out only through the partial accounts of the wagon drivers, who were able to give only garbled and not at all accurate descriptions of the exciting business of the morning.

"I hear you kids have been in the hero business," grinned Private Hyman, coming over to the chums.

"You're a friend of ours, Hyman, aren't you?" asked Private Overton, flushing.

"I surely consider myself one," replied Hyman.

"Will you do us a great favor?"

"You know I will, if I can."

"Then drop the hero business and forget all about it," begged Hal.

"I reckon I like you better for that," nodded Hyman. "Lovely weather we're having, isn't it?"

"Lovely air this afternoon," laughed Noll, sniffing. "Just smell the odors coming from the Army stoves."

"Now you're talking about your own exploits," teased Hyman. "You were on the detail that went in after the fresh grub that's going to make two hundred men, more or less, extremely happy to-night."

"Attention, B Company!" called out Lieutenant Prescott, stepping in among the groups of resting soldiers. "I am directed by Captain Cortland to state that, immediately after supper to-night, twenty men of B Company may have leave to visit Mason City. But they will be required to be back here punctually at ten o'clock to-morrow morning. Men who wish to avail themselves of the proffered leave will see Sergeant Gray without delay."

"Going in, Hyman?" asked Hal, as that soldier turned to walk away.

"If I'm fortunate enough to get leave," nodded Hyman. "There are several things I want to do in town."

The supper that night was as perfect and as hearty as the resources of camp permitted. Some of the soldiers ate so heartily that they

were presently content to lie about camp for the evening, and were glad they had not applied for town leave.

Captain Freeman had allowed the same number of his men town leave.

Just before dark forty United States doughboys started down the trail, bent on pleasure and sight-seeing.

Being on leave, none of these men were allowed to carry their arms with them. Nothing, for that matter, could be much more awkward to a soldier than his rifle when on leave to visit town.

"Be careful, men, that none of you overstay your leave," Lieutenant Hampton called warningly, as the town party started down the trail.

"We won't, sir," came the chorused answer.

This is always the promise of men on leave. Sometimes, in the excitement of pleasures, the promise is forgotten, or ignored, and then trouble is sure to follow.

CHAPTER XVII

ROUNDING UP THE MISSING LEAVE MEN

CAMP police, which means the care and tidying of camp, and the carrying out of hygienic precautions, occupied the soldiers in camp most of the time between breakfast and nine o'clock.

Then the toilers were dismissed for rest.

"Mr. Hampton," called Captain Cortland, "you may notify Sergeant Gray that assembly will sound at 10.15. Just before that, at 10.10, roll-call of the men on town leave will take place."

Some minutes before ten o'clock a lot of the men of both companies began to straggle in.

"There will be some of the boys who won't be here on time, though," Private Hyman confided to Hal.

"A soldier who gets leave and doesn't respect it is either a fool or too mean a shirker to be in the service," Hal returned.

"That's what I tried to tell some of the fellows in town," laughed Hyman lightly. "You ought to have heard them thank me! But, oh, what's the use? A fellow who is going to make a good soldier of himself always does the near-

est he can to right, and the other kind seldom get back on a second enlistment, anyway."

A few minutes later Sergeant Gray's voice could be heard calling:

"B Company men returned from town leave fall in here for roll-call."

Further down the camp, C Company's first sergeant could be heard giving the same summons.

Instead of twenty men, only fourteen of B's fell in.

Sergeant Gray looked them over with disgust written on his fine, bronzed, soldiery old face, for Gray had served twenty-four years with the colors.

Then he began to call the roll.

"Dismissed," he announced as soon as he had finished reading.

Turning on his heel, a look of deep concern on his face, Sergeant Gray reported to Captain Cortland.

"Well, Sergeant?"

"Six men absent from roll-call, sir."

"Who are the six men?"

"Burt, Coy, Dowley, Hooper, Landers and Corporal Minturn, sir."

"Direct Sergeant Hupner to report to me at once."

"Very good, sir."

Sergeant Hupner came up at a brisk stride, saluting.

"Sergeant," continued Captain Cortland, "I am very sorry to say that six of B Company's men have violated their pledge and have not returned from leave. Doubtless all of them are in Mason City at this moment."

"Yes, sir."

"Take a detail of six men, reporting their names to Sergeant Gray, and start with as little delay as possible for Mason City."

"Yes, sir. May I ask a question?"

"Certainly."

"If I should meet any of the missing men on their way back here shall I place them under arrest?"

"If you find them at a greater distance than one hundred yards of this camp, Sergeant, put them in arrest and take them into Mason City and back again with you."

"Very good, sir."

"And don't allow any man to have any amusement whatever in Mason City after you arrest him."

"Very good, sir."

"Lack of punctuality is a very serious military offense, Sergeant. I shall do all that is possible to stamp it out in B Company."

"Yes, sir."

"That is all, Sergeant. You do not need any further instructions, for you are an old soldier and can be depended upon."

"Thank you, sir."

"Sergeant Gray will give you the names of the delinquents."

"Very good, sir."

With a final salute Sergeant Hupner turned and strode away. If his gait were any indication, Hupner meant to capture every one of the delinquents with the least possible loss of time.

"You want another trip to Mason City, Overton?" queried Hupner, halting before the soldier boy.

"Not for fun," replied Hal, "but I'll go there, or anywhere else on earth, on a matter of duty."

"You're my man," nodded Hupner. "You, too, Terry. Hyman, I guess you may have an idea where some of the delinquents are holding forth in Mason City?"

"I guess I know," nodded Private Hyman, "though not from associating with any of them."

Three other men were quickly detailed. While the men of this detachment were arming themselves, Hupner hastened to Sergeant Gray for a list of the delinquents.

"Fall in. By twos right, march!"

Hupner led his detachment from camp, and

was nearly a hundred yards on his way when the bugler blew the call for assembly.

A military commander, even a corporal or sergeant, is expected to get his command in action with the loss of not even seconds.

And a very business-like looking little force this was. Not a man carried a rifle. Instead, each man had drawn a revolver, which now dangled in holster from his belt. Each soldier also wore at the belt a pair of handcuffs, though these would be used only on troublesome prisoners.

"Squad halt!"

The marching men were about a mile out of Mason City when this command came.

Sergeant Hupner, in the lead, had caught a glimpse of a sight that was soon after revealed to the halted men.

Around a bend in the road, beside a jutting piece of higher ground, lurched an unsteady figure.

That figure, moreover, was clothed in the uniform of the United States Regular Army, but now the uniform was badly soiled and battered.

"Where are you going, Coy?" sharply demanded Sergeant Hupner.

The youth—he was barely more than twenty-one, halted unsteadily, blinking at Sergeant

Hupner as though he were not sure whether he saw one, two or three sergeants.

"Where are you going?" sternly repeated Sergeant Hupner.

"Thash all (hic) right, Sarge," replied Private Coy thickly.

He seemed in danger of losing his balance as he stood there blinking.

"It's all wrong," snapped out Hupner crisply. "Answer me. Where do you think you are going?"

"Back to (hic) camp, Sarge."

"You're a disgrace to the uniform," rapped out the sergeant. "You a soldier! You're not even fit to be an anarchist! You miserable, drunken disgrace to the uniform!"

"Oh, thash all (hic) ri', Sarge. Had bully time. Now'm going back to camp."

"What you need is company, then," returned Sergeant Hupner grimly. "Adams, fall out and go back with him. If Coy gets too drowsy to navigate you can wait here on the trail for us. If he gets quarrelsome then put the bracelets on him."

"Don' (hic) need no brashlets," asserted Private Coy with great gravity. "I'm all ri'. Gentleman, I am."

"Come along," ordered Private Adams, though he spoke gently, as he took the unfor-

tunate lad's arm. "They're waiting for you now in camp."

Sergeant Hupner stood there in the trail, gazing after Coy with a look of mingled contempt and pity on his face.

"Thank heaven the good mother who reared that weak piece of flesh isn't here to drop tears over him now," muttered the sergeant. "Forward, route step, march!"

People on the streets in Mason City gazed curiously when they saw the little detachment march in. Many of these people, when they saw the revolvers and handcuffs at the soldiers' belts, were able to make a good guess at Hupner's mission.

So did several of the loafers of the town, who make a business of guiding prospective victims to saloons and other disorderly places.

Some of these members of the scum of the town promptly slipped away to give warning in the places where they believed or knew some of the delinquent soldiers might be found at that moment.

At the head of the main street of the town Sergeant Hupner halted his command.

"Overton and Terry, fall out," commanded Sergeant Hupner. "You men will start right here, one on either side of the street, and visit in turn each saloon on the street. You will also

look into any private rooms that you may find connected with these saloons. If you find any of the missing men you will bring them out into the street. Hyman, fall out. You will remain in the street to receive and hold any prisoners that Overton or Terry may bring to you. Men, you are armed, but you will remember that you are to use your weapons only in case of dire necessity. Yet, at any hazard, you will arrest and hold any man of B Company that you find."

"Shall we arrest any of C Company's men that we may find?" inquired Hal.

"You won't find any," replied Sergeant Hupner. "All of C's town-leave men were back on time. It's B that takes all the disgrace this time."

For this important duty Sergeant Hupner had chosen Hal and Noll, because he knew they could be depended upon to enter saloons without being tempted to buy any of the vile wares exposed there for sale.

Moreover, they were both so staunch in their principles that they could enter such places—on duty—without being degraded thereby.

But, though both soldier boys searched saloon after saloon, they did not seem destined to find any of the delinquents. Private Hyman was standing out in the street, with nothing to do.

"Some one must have spread the alarm," thought Private Overton. "Or else the men are really not in any of these vile places. I hope the last guess is the true one."

At last Soldier Hal came to the last resort of the kind on his side of the street.

As he started to push open the door of this place a big, broad-shouldered, red-faced man stepped into the doorway.

"Nothing doing here, soldier kid," leered the fellow.

"Pardon me, but I didn't ask you," was Hal's quick retort.

"Clear out! Hear? You can't come in here, I told you."

"You're dealing with the United States Army now, my man," Hal retorted coolly. "Out of my way, if you please. I'm going inside."

"No, you're not."

"Out of my way was what I said."

"An' I said——"

The red-faced man didn't finish.

Private Hal Overton had drawn his service revolver from its holster without the loss of another instant.

It rested now with its muzzle poking against the big fellow's belt line.

Gasping, he looked into the clear, cool eyes of the young soldier boy.

Then, with an oath, the bully sprang aside, and Hal stepped inside as though no interruption had occurred, at the same time slipping his weapon back into its holster.

The man who had stopped him was not, sometimes, much afraid of revolvers. But he had seen something in the glint of Private Overton's eyes which had made him realize that the young soldier would not tolerate any nonsense whatever.

As Hal stepped inside the place his gaze swept around through the fog of the smoke-laden atmosphere.

It was a saloon of the worst description, as was amply testified by the appearance of the rough-looking customers there.

Overton was the only man in sight who wore the United States uniform.

However, the soldier boy walked down the length of the room, for it was within the range of possibilities that a soldier starting in on a carouse might first exchange his uniform for a suit of civilian clothing.

Not a face in the assemblage was that of a B Company man.

"The sneak!" Hal heard a voice say, and knew that the epithet was applied to himself. But he paid no heed.

"Club him," advised another.

"No wonder soldiers desert," growled still another sodden fellow, "when they send anything like that, with a gun, after another soldier that's out for a good time."

To not one man in the place did the clean-cut face, the evident manliness and fine soldierliness of Private Overton appeal. Hal was not of their kind, and these creatures could not appreciate the higher kind of manhood in this young soldier.

"Ye may jest as well get out of here, kid in brass buttons," jeered a voice behind the bar. "None of yer crew are in here."

But Hal had halted before a door at the end of the room, his hand on the knob.

"Here," yelled a voice, "don't you go in there! That's my family's quarters. Private!"

But Soldier Hal, without replying, pushed the door open and stepped over the sill.

He found himself in a short, narrow passage, the only light coming from the room he had just left.

Beyond was another doorway. Hal stepped to that and turned the knob.

"Waiter!" hailed an impatient voice. "What kept you so long?"

Two other men laughed coarsely, but in an instant the laughter had died out of their voices.

Hal was in a room in the center of which stood a table.

Gathered around that table, in a dense blue haze that ascended from burning tobacco, sat Corporal Minturn and Privates Dowley and Hooper.

"Attention!" Private Overton rapped out sharply. "You are all under arrest for overstaying your leave!"

"Forget it, and get outside as quick as you can," growled Private Dowley.

"You are all under arrest," Hal repeated firmly.

With an oath Dowley leaped up, retreated to the far end of the room and picked up a club. With this in his hand, he wheeled about, glaring angrily.

Corporal Minturn and Private Hooper were also on their feet.

"Get out of here, you little tin soldier!" roared the corporal, who appeared to have imbibed more than either of his companions.

"Come, start, you kid gun-toter," insisted Bill Hooper.

"Stop your nonsense, men," Hal replied, gazing at them steadily. "I have told you that you are under arrest."

"Floor him with that club, Dowley!" ordered Hooper.

"Won't I, though—just!" retorted Dowley, adding an oath as he leaped forward.

Soldier Hal knew that he had reckless men to deal with, but that was no reason why he should not do his full duty.

CHAPTER XVIII

DOWLEY EGGS ON A CATSPAW

DOWLEY, as he sprang forward, found the muzzle of Private Overton's revolver uncomfortably close to him.

"No nonsense," warned Hal. "I don't want to hurt any one, but I'm here on duty."

Dowley eyed the soldier boy viciously for an instant, then, with another oath, leaped forward.

Bang!

Private Overton fired without a second's delay, though he did not shoot to hit.

Into the wood at the end of the room crashed the bullet.

But Dowley, who had not believed that the "kid soldier" would dare fire, dropped to the floor.

"Get up," commanded Hal, eyeing him closely.

"I'll suit myself," snarled the man on the floor.

The firing had been plainly heard in the outer room.

Two or three of the weaker-nerved patrons out there promptly made a break for the street. None ventured into that inner room. Corporal

Minturn and his companions must now take care of themselves.

But this, in their present ugly mood, they seemed quite able to do.

"Don't act like a fool, Dowley," rasped Hal impatiently. "The detachment is strong enough to take you back, man, and you'll have to go back in irons if you attempt to stir up trouble. Get up!"

"Not to please you, though!" growled Dowley, as he leaped to his feet.

He still retained his grip on the bludgeon.

"Drop that club," ordered Hal sternly.

"You clear out!"

"Drop that club!"

"Make me."

"You're determined to act foolishly, aren't you?" demanded Hal with the ring of contempt in his voice.

"I'm bound to do as I please," leered Dowley viciously.

"You can't when you're in arrest," replied Hal.

"But I'm not in arrest."

"I've already told you that you are," Hal insisted coolly.

"I don't take my facts from a kid like you," sneered Dowley, edging closer.

"Get back!" warned Soldier Hal.

But Dowley, grasping the club tighter, made a sudden lunge.

Bang!

Hal fired his second shot. Not even now did he aim to hit. The bullet whizzed past Dowley's left ear. But that fellow, who had seen the quick pressure of Soldier Hal's finger on the trigger, threw himself flat to the floor once more, and this time the club rolled from his hand.

"I mean business, and it will be better for all of you to understand it," Private Overton announced. "Get up, Dowley, and you three men form in single file. Corporal Minturn, you take the lead."

"I'll take it in another way," leered the corporal, bending and snatching up the club. "Hooper, you pin the kid's arms!"

Hooper made a move on Hal's other side. The soldier boy had to dodge to avoid being seized.

As he did so Dowley leaped up from the floor to join in the attack from in front.

Again Hal Overton raised his service revolver, though with no more intention than before of wounding any of the ugly trio.

But Corporal Minturn, as his muddled brain now figured it, had to strike in self-defense.

Whack!

It was a lusty blow, backed by venom and muscle.

Private Hal Overton simply crumpled up and fell to the floor, motionless.

"You sneaking dogs!" rang Private Hyman's scornful voice from the doorway. "Get your hands up now, all of you, or there'll be some real war!"

Backing Hyman, Noll Terry darted into the room.

Hal's first shot had not been heard, but Hyman's quick ear had heard the second.

Scenting trouble, in an instant Hyman had summoned Private Terry, who just then appeared on the street, and both had dashed into this place.

"Get your hands up, all of you, before I shoot fast and hard to square matters for the kid!" Hyman now insisted savagely.

Noll got a glimpse of Hal lying on the floor, and added savagely:

"Oh, I'm just itching for an excuse to shoot!"

There could be no doubt of the temper of these newcomers. Danger partially sobered these ugly ones. Up went their hands without further delay.

"Put your hands down, just one at a time," continued Hyman. "Terry, you take Corporal Minturn first and iron him."

Click! Snap! Minturn was in no position to do further harm.

It was Hooper's turn next. That big fellow was utterly cowed and began to talk rather whiningly.

"Hold your tongue!" commanded Noll angrily.

Then he went over and ironed Dowley, who, still sullen, was capable, while free, of becoming suddenly more dangerous than either of his companions.

"I reckon Minturn fixed your bunkie for good, anyway. I hope he did," Dowley ground out between his closed teeth.

"I'm sorry I've got the handcuffs on you," flared Noll. "If your hands were free I'd enjoy pounding you all over the floor!"

"Take off the links, then, and try it," sneered Dowley.

"Hold your tongue, you dog!" barked Private Hyman.

"Oh, you're a brave man, when you've got the other crowd in irons," spat out Dowley sneeringly.

"I'm brave enough for you at any time," taunted Hyman. "This was your job"—pointing to prostrate, unconscious Hal—"but you egged another man on to do it, you cowardly cur!"

"Is that so?" sneered Dowley.

"Well, you know best," retorted Hyman contemptuously.

"You can watch 'em now for a minute," broke in Noll. "I'm going to see if I can find Sergeant Hupner. If I can't, I'm going to get the first doctor I can."

"You can get doctors to burn," replied Hyman. "This is a sanitarium town, and the pickings here are fat for the medicos."

Noll ran through the larger room. The men there turned to scowl at him, but Noll gave no heed to any of them.

Out in the street, at a little distance, he saw Sergeant Hupner and the two remaining men of the detachment coming along with two soldier prisoners.

Noll set up a shout. Hupner, espying him, came on the run.

"Have you found any of the others?" demanded the sergeant.

"We have all the other delinquents. But," choked Noll, "I'm fearfully afraid that Minturn has done for Hal Overton for good."

"Where is Overton?" demanded the sergeant swiftly.

"In a private room at the rear, Sergeant," Noll answered, pointing. "You can find the way. I'm going to rustle for a doctor."

"Good boy," nodded Hupner, and darted into the evil place.

Within three minutes Private Noll Terry entered the place, followed by a keen-eyed young physician.

Hal still lay unconscious on the floor, a bad gap showing across the top of his head, and a red pool on the floor near him.

Private Hyman was now kneeling beside the young soldier, his eyes misty.

"I'm glad you're here, Doctor," nodded Hyman, speaking huskily as he rose. "I was just going to try to do something myself, but was afraid I might do the wrong thing."

"I didn't know what I was doing," muttered Corporal Minturn weakly. "I wasn't responsible."

"Silence! Tell that to the court-martial," broke in Sergeant Hupner in a tone of sheer disgust. "Be quick, Doctor, won't you? And if there is anything that we can do to help you, speak."

The young physician was now feeling the cut on Hal's head, the skilled fingers glided easily along the edges of the wound, pressing lightly against the bones of the skull.

"This couldn't well be much worse," announced the physician, looking up. "But before I do much, or make a thorough examination, I

want this soldier in bed. Have you a surgeon at camp?"

"No, sir," replied Sergeant Hupner.

"Then I'll get out my automobile and take the young man up in the car, after washing the cut and putting on a first bandage."

CHAPTER XIX

A DISPUTE IN THE GUARD HOUSE

OF the ride that followed back to camp Hal Overton knew nothing.

Noll Terry sat beside him, supporting him.

Of course the automobile reached camp a long time ahead of the detachment with prisoners.

Captain Cortland caught sight of the car and came hastening to meet it.

Noll Terry leaped out, saluting.

"Sir, I have to report that Corporal Minturn assaulted Private Overton, and that we called in a physician, who has brought Overton out here."

"How badly is Overton hurt?" demanded the captain, hastening to the side of the auto.

"Badly," replied the physician. "Have you any facilities here for the care of a man who may have brain fever if he lives for the next forty-eight hours?"

"We have a hospital steward and four hospital corps men," replied Captain Cortland.

"And bandages and medicines?"

"An abundance of them."

"Then your soldier lad may have some show.

He'll no doubt be better off here than among strangers in town. When do you start back to your post, Captain?"

"In the morning of the day after to-morrow," Cortland answered. "One moment, please. Sergeant Gray!"

The first sergeant hurried up, saluting.

"Sergeant, send the hospital steward here. Then see that a hospital tent is taken from one of the supply wagons and set up at once and make the patient as comfortable as possible."

Within ten minutes the tent was up, with a cot, a table, two chairs, bandages, medicine chest and other accessories.

Now, with the help of the steward, the physician gave the injured soldier boy a very thorough examination, washed the gash carefully and bandaged it.

Directions were left with the steward, who was a trained nurse, and then the physician returned to town, after having been requested to call again on the following day.

Hal Overton knew little, and that little in a dreamy, disorganized way, even when his cot was carefully placed and secured in one of the transport wagons for the return to Fort Clowdry.

The roughness of the first part of the ride brought on mild delirium. Two days later, how-

ever, after being placed on a cot in the military hospital at Fort Clowdry, Soldier Hal opened his eyes with a keener realization of the world about him.

"How do you feel, Overton?" asked one of the hospital corps men, bending over him.

"Like a fool," sighed Hal.

"Why?"

"A youngster like me has no business wasting time in hospital. Can I get out to-day?"

"I'm afraid not," smiled the hospital corps man.

"I'm not badly hurt, am I?"

"If the rainmaker knows his business, you've had a fight for your life, and youth and a good constitution have won out."

"How long am I to be here?"

"You'll be here for three or four days yet," answered the hospital corps man.

"But——"

"That's about all the talking you'd better try to do until the rainmaker has seen you," interposed the hospital corps man, and moved away as he added:

"Either sleep, or just keep quiet."

But the next morning Hal was so much improved that the hospital corps man took a chair by the bedside.

"You may want some of the news, Overton,

about things that have happened while you've been here."

"I am just a bit curious," smiled Overton.

"Three of the delinquents got off with ordinary summary court punishments—fines and a little stretch at the guard house. But Minturn, Dowley and Hooper are locked up there, too, and they've got to wait and stand court-martial. Their day in the Army is ended, I reckon."

"It ought to be," nodded Hal. "They're no good to the service."

Noll was allowed to come in for a few minutes that afternoon.

Eight days passed ere Hal Overton was released from hospital. Then the surgeon marked him "quarters" on sick report, which meant that Private Overton was excused from all duties, and must spend his time in taking care of himself only.

Four four days he continued to be marked "quarters," chafing all the time.

"There's a lot I've got to learn about the soldiering business," he grumbled. "I haven't any time to waste loafing."

"There's one soldierly duty you can learn right now, then," smiled Soldier Noll quizzically.

"What's that?"

"You can learn how to obey the rainmaker when you fall under his orders," replied his chum indulgently.

"How does an impatient fellow learn that, I wonder?" sighed Hal.

"Why, what are you kicking about?" demanded Noll in pretended astonishment. "You're surely not being overworked, and you're getting in trim for the next work we have cut out for us."

"What's that?"

"Haven't you heard?"

"Not a word."

"Why, the whole battalion, except for a small guard squad from each company, is to be ordered to the September encampment of the Colorado National Guard. The regulars are to be represented there by field artillery, cavalry, infantry, signal corps men and engineer troops. Hal, it's going to be great! There'll be more than eight hundred regulars and two brigades of militia in camp together."

"It won't do me any good," retorted Private Overton cynically.

"Why not?"

"I'm just out of hospital, and I'll be stuck on the home guard detail from B Company."

"Oh, I don't believe that," urged Noll soothingly.

"Wait and see."

There came a morning when Private Overton marched over to hospital with the other men on sick report.

"You seem to be doing pretty well now, Overton," remarked Lieutenant Gross, the surgeon.

"How are you going to mark me, sir, to-day?" breathed Hal anxiously.

"Duty," smiled the rainmaker.

"Thank goodness," murmured the soldier boy.

"Why, what's the matter with being marked quarters, Overton?"

"Fine, for a loafer, sir, but I want to learn the soldier business, and I haven't any time to lose."

"From all I hear," remarked the rainmaker, "you're learning the soldier business fully as rapidly as you need to."

"There's a lot more I want to know, sir, and it can't be learned when a man is marked 'hospital' or 'quarters,' sir," Hal returned. "Thank you for marking me 'duty.'"

"There's a real soldier, or I'm too green to be an officer," thought Lieutenant Gross, as his eyes followed Hal, who, erect and full of spring, was striding from the room.

On the third day after his return to duty Hal was warned for the guard. The following morn-

ing he turned out to be inspected with the new guard.

As he was not assigned to the first relief, Hal seated himself inside the guard house, picking up one of the books that rested on a table there and began reading.

Presently the other soldiers sauntered outside, and Soldier Hal was left there alone.

"Overton!"

Hal laid down his book, rising and stepping over to a cell door to find Dowley's eyes glaring at him balefully.

"You sneak, you're responsible for getting me into all this trouble!" hissed the soldier in arrest.

"Dowley, you know very well that the rules forbid a member of the guard from talking with a prisoner, except when the talk is strictly in the line of duty."

With that Soldier Hal turned and went back to his book.

"You could have gotten out of that place in Mason City when I told you to," went on Dowley hoarsely. "Then all that followed would never have happened."

Hal went on reading.

"Say, Hooper," muttered Dowley aloud to the man in another cell, "as a fresh kid ain't that fellow the end of the world?"

"He's a boot-lick," jeered Hooper.

"He just sneaks around the officers, telling 'em lies so as to get things easier for himself," broke in Corporal Minturn from still another cell. For these three, unlike the ordinary run of guard-house prisoners, had been placed in separate confinement.

Hal read on, though the color mounted to his cheeks.

"You dirty dog!" cried Dowley hoarsely.

"Lying sneak!" from Bill Hooper.

"Two-cent boot-lick!" was Corporal Minturn's contribution.

Hal laid down his book, rose and stepped over to where he could look at the three, one after another.

"If you men don't hold your tongues," he warned coolly, "I shall have to report you to the corporal of the guard for abusive talk. I don't want to do that, either."

"Oh, my, a little bit of authority!" sneered Corporal Minturn.

"Tin general!" taunted Dowley.

"Go and boot-lick some more!" urged Bill Hooper.

"Corporal of the guard!" summoned Soldier Hal.

Corporal Sykes entered promptly.

"Corporal, these men in solitary are amusing

themselves by heaping insults upon me. I don't report them, Corporal, on account of personal feeling, for they're down on their luck, and they hold me responsible for it, as in a measure, of course, I am. But I don't want to get on the record for laxity while on guard."

"Quite right, Overton," nodded Corporal Sykes. Then, turning to the three "solitaries," he demanded:

"Why are you prisoners guilty of insulting and abusive language toward a member of the guard?"

"He's too well satisfied with himself," sneered Bill Hooper.

"Ditto," scowled Dowley.

"What have you to say, Minturn?" demanded Corporal Sykes.

"The kid just sat down there to make us mad," replied Minturn in a growling voice. "The sight of that boot-lick makes me sick all over."

"That's all I want to know," replied Corporal Sykes calmly. "You've all admitted the abusive language, so I'll enter it on report, which will be brought up at court-martial. If there's any further report about you men I'll mention the matter to the officer of the day. Where are you going with that book, Overton?"

"Since the sight of myself disturbs the prison-

ers," Hal replied, "I am going to take my book outside."

"I'd rather you wouldn't," replied Corporal Sykes crisply. "Members of the guard have a right in here, and prisoners who don't like a member of the guard had no business to become prisoners."

CHAPTER XX

PROMOTION FLIES IN THE AIR

A FEW days later the court-martial was convened at Fort Clowdry.

In the cases of the three "solitaries" the evidence was speedily in.

With the evidence furnished by Hal, Noll, Hyman and others, the accused delinquents were found guilty.

At the trial there had come another surprise. Evidence had just been forwarded from the recruiting office where Dowley had enlisted. This evidence showed that Frank Dowley was a highly respected man in his own part of the country, but he had left home and gone hundreds of miles away for new employment.

The prisoner who stood before the court as Dowley was Frederick Cramp in his own proper name, and had served a term in jail for robbery. Cramp had a generally bad reputation. Finding himself closely pursued by the sheriff's officers for a newly committed crime, Cramp had seized upon the inspiration to enter the Army under the assumed name of Dowley. In the ranks he believed that none of the pursuing officers would think of looking for him.

The references of the supposed Dowley had come back from the home town with such splendid indorsement that the enlisting officer had imagined that he had found a most satisfactory recruit in Frederick Cramp.

It is likely that the deceit would never have been discovered, had not Frank Dowley—the real one—lately returned to his home town. He had been astounded when his friends had questioned him about Army life, and, on hearing the news, had hastened to the nearest recruiting office, from which this strange story had come to be laid before the court-martial just in time to punish the culprit.

"Dowley" was sentenced to be dishonorably dismissed from the service, with forfeiture of pay and allowances, to serve one year at a military prison and then to be turned over to the civil authorities for such further punishment as might develop.

Corporal Minturn, too, was sentenced to be dismissed from the service, and to serve one year at a military prison.

Private Bill Hooper got off with simple dismissal.

Then the prisoners were sent back to the guard house until the findings and sentences had been passed upon and signed by the department commander.

A week later the papers were returned with the indorsement of the brigadier general commanding the department.

Dowley, Hooper and Minturn left under guard the same day.

"They're all generals now," mimicked Private Hyman.

"Generals?" queried Noll.

"Yes; general prisoners."

"Bill Hooper will be on the retired list when he reaches Denver, anyway," smiled Hal. "Having no stretch to serve, he's to be turned loose when the guard reaches that city."

The morning after, as Colonel North sat in his office at headquarters, an orderly entered and handed him a telegram.

"Orderly!" called the colonel crisply two minutes later.

A young soldier of the guard stepped in, saluting and standing at attention.

"Orderly, my compliments to Captain Cortland, and ask him to attend me here as soon as possible."

Five minutes later B Company's commander entered and saluted.

"Take a seat, Cortland," urged the older man. "I have a telegram here that will interest you. It's from the senior surgeon at department military hospital. Corporal Hapgood, of your com-

pany, who was sent there for treatment, died yesterday. A very bad case of typhoid had developed."

"Then poor Hapgood won't be sent back here for burial, sir?"

"No; the despatch says that the corporal is being buried there to-day."

"I'm sorry for Hapgood," said Captain Cortland solemnly, a slight break in his voice. "He was a man, every inch of him, and a fine soldier with big promise for the future. I have his mother's address, and I will write her. But the best kind of letter will seem a poor substitute for a son in the case of that lonely old mother. He was all she had."

"The mother will be able to draw a pension of twelve dollars a month for the rest of her life, then," replied the colonel. "That is something, even if not as good as having a live son to comfort her."

"Yes; the pension will be assured," mused Captain Cortland.

"By the way, Cortland, you are now shy on two corporals in your company."

"Yes, Colonel; I was about to speak of that to you."

"Whom do you want appointed in their places?"

The colonel of a regiment appoints all non-

commissioned officers in his regiment; he also "breaks," or reduces them to the ranks at his pleasure, if any need comes up.

But, though the colonel has the appointive power, he always consults with the commander of a company about any new appointments of non-coms. in that company.

"I have several good men who are entitled to appointment," replied Captain Cortland slowly.

"Then you haven't made up your mind?"

"I can, easily, sir, if you wish it."

"I am thinking, captain, only of the fact that, if the appointments be not promptly made you will run very short on corporals," replied the colonel.

"There's Hyman, sir, and Conrad. Both are bright, attentive soldiers. Then there are Overton and Terry. They're quite new men, but they've made records for themselves in the short time they've been with us."

"Any others?" asked Colonel North, tapping his knee with the pencil that he held in one hand.

"A few others, sir, but none with quite as good claims as the four men I've named."

"Whom do you favor most, Captain?"

"It's hard to say, sir. Hyman is nearly through with his enlistment, and Conrad in the

middle of his third enlistment. Now, from length of service it looks as though Conrad ought to have one of the appointments."

"A man who is well along in his third enlistment, and hasn't been made a non-com. in all that time ought not to have much consideration if there are other men with better natural claims," replied Colonel North. "A man who is thoroughly qualified to be a corporal ought to get there in less than seven or eight years, don't you think so?"

"That's true, sir," Captain Cortland nodded.

"Is Hyman as good a man as Overton or Terry?" continued the regimental commander, apparently much interested.

"He has had longer experience, but I think Overton and Terry are both a shade above Hyman in natural aptitude; in fact, the lads are considerably above him."

"Then——"

"I see your drift, Colonel, and I agree with you. I therefore urge, sir, that Overton and Terry be appointed as corporals, and I will keep Hyman in mind for the next chance that comes up."

"You are satisfied, then, Captain, to make Overton and Terry corporals?"

"More than satisfied, Colonel. One of these days they'll be sergeants, at that. A company

commander, I take it, sir, can't start too early to fire the spark of ambition in the right men."

"You and I are agreed on that, then, Cortland. I am glad you have recommended Overton and Terry as corporals. I will have their appointments published in orders this afternoon."

No suspicion had Hal or Noll when they fell in for parade that afternoon.

When Lieutenant Wright, battalion adjutant, published the orders, he read off four routine orders before he came to that creating Private Hal Overton a corporal in B Company.

"Whew! It has come, but I didn't expect anything like that," quivered Soldier Hal. "I didn't think I could do it inside of a year."

"Lucky Hal," thought Private Terry. "He has gotten ahead of me, but I'm glad just the same. It has always been the rule for Hal to beat me, anyway."

The next order made Noll Terry's hair stand up. He had been made a corporal, too.

How the hearts of both danced when the regimental band played the headquarter's battalion from the parade ground.

"You two are the lucky soldier kids," cried Private Hyman, coming up to the boys with outstretched hands. "How did you manage it?"

"That's the point, Hyman," laughed Hal

happily; "we didn't manage it. It just happened."

Before the quartermaster's store closed both soldier boys drew their corporal's chevrons, then hunted up the company tailor to get him to sew these prized badges of rank on their sleeves.

"I suppose, Sergeant, one or both of us will be transferred from your squad room," said Hal regretfully, when they encountered Hupner.

"I've heard nothing to that effect as yet, Corporal," replied the room sergeant.

"Corporal!" How wonderfully fine that simple title sounded, though the title meant but one step above that of plain private soldier.

"I'm sorry for one thing, Corporal," laughed Private Hyman, that night after supper.

"What's that?" Hal queried.

"I'm extremely sorry that your old chums, Hooper and Dowley, tired of the Army too soon to see your chevrons on your sleeves. Say, but I think those chevrons are about the handsomest I've ever seen," added Private Hyman, an undertone of wistfulness in his voice.

The next day brought more good news. The date was set on which headquarter's band and the first battalion of the Thirty-fourth was to leave for Denver, to take part in the summer encampment of the Colorado National Guard. Neither Corporal Overton nor Corporal Terry

was assigned to the guard detachment that was to remain behind.

Lieutenant Greg Holmes, only a few months out of West Point, drew a "blank" that made his face look gloomy. Lieutenant Holmes was the only officer in the battalion who was to remain behind. He was to have command of the guard that was to take care of the post in the absence of the troops.

CHAPTER XXI

THE PRICE OF BEING A MAN

THE occasion was the encampment of the Colorado National Guard, and the scene was a few miles outside of Denver.

Here was some of the real glory of the soldier's life!

At the head of the line rode two troops of cavalry belonging to the regular Army.

Immediately behind these yellow-legs an awe-inspiring drum-major strode along, his glittering, ball-tipped staff going through many smart movements. Right behind him came the Thirty-fourth U. S. Infantry Band, crashing out a soul-stirring march.

At the heels of the band rode Colonel North, Major Silsbee and staff, a splendid, soldierly looking lot in saddle.

Then the head of A Company, Captain Ruggles commanding. B Company next, and to B Company fell the honor of being color company and escorting the Flag. C and D behind—the whole khaki-clad battalion moving at easy swing, and yet in the straight, precise lines that only regulars know how to display, however close near-soldiers may imagine they come in excel-

lence. Over all, in brisk cadence, and in exact time to the spirited music ahead, sounded the steady whump! whump! whump! of the exactly gaited feet of regulars on the march.

No wonder the crowd that lined the sides of the road cheered! No wonder that girls waved handkerchiefs! Here and there men, youths and boys who knew enough lifted their hats as the colors passed.

It is strange that not all American males, of all ages, know that the hat is to be raised from the head and lowered to place over the heart as the national colors are borne by.

Yet all of those of the male spectators who did not know enough to uncover on the approach of the colors still felt the glory of the scene. Love of the military is common to all true-beating hearts. The country dies in which this love of the military vanishes.

Behind the infantry lumbered the guns and caissons of two batteries of field artillery, drivers alert and gunners sitting up very straight, yet appearing wholly at ease.

It takes the man of military experience to be both erect and at ease at the same time. Some civilians come very close in this achievement, but theirs is the imitation grace of personal carriage.

At the extreme left of the line marched a

platoon of engineer troops and a detachment of men from the signal corps.

The regulars were now in the last half mile of the march down a beautifully shaded road that led to the broad fields on which the encampment was pitched this year.

Hundreds of boys were following the parade as a matter of course. Where is the live boy whose heart is dead to the soldiers?

As the Thirty-fourth's band played out the final notes of the march, the order for route step marching ran down the line.

Just then, from a parallel road less than a quarter of a mile away, another band blared forth in a quickstep. The crowd was quick to turn and look.

Through the intervals between trees and bushes could be seen another line of military. An entire brigade of the National Guard was over on that road, also headed for the encampment field.

"Hey, Tommie!" called one boy to another. "Cut across with me. There's about ten miles of sogers over there!"

"Chase yourself, if you wanter go," yelled back Tommie. "They're militia. Me for here, with the real-thing sogers, just back from the wars!"

There was a laugh from many in the crowd,

while the smaller boys whooped. It was hard even for the erect regulars in ranks to repress their grins when they received that tribute from a discerning small boy.

But the small American boy, even if ignorant of everything else in the soldier's manuals, can usually be depended upon to know the difference between regulars and militiamen. To the small boy's mind the difference is as great as that between the circus and the country fair.

Uncle Sam's musicians struck up again, just as the column entered the encampment field.

Wagon trains had gone on ahead.

Regulars and national guardsmen broke ranks at nearly the same moment.

Then followed an exhibition that some of the spectators never forgot.

In about a half an hour the regular troops had their tents up, in straight, precise company streets, and all their belongings moved in. Nor were these the "dog-tents" of field duty. As the encampment was to last for a week, the regulars slept at night in full-sized Army tents, with several men in each tent.

At the end of two hours the national guardsmen were still perspiring over their tasks of pitching camp.

The regulars, cool and wholly at ease, were going about other camp duties.

"Look at the amateurs over yonder," grinned Corporal Noll Terry, calling his chum's attention to the brigade of national guardsmen.

"Poor fellows, it's a good deal like work for them," remarked Hal. "They're not drilled in this thing all the time."

"They go about it like so many clowns," laughed Noll.

"Now, I wouldn't say that," urged Corporal Hal. "Remember, the national guardsmen do other things for a living, and do this work for love of state and country."

"But why do they need to be such boobs about pitching a camp?" demanded Noll.

"Because it isn't their accustomed business," Hal retorted.

"Bosh! The tin soldiers make me tired," laughed Corporal Noll.

"Then you want to change your attitude," warned Hal, "for you've got the wrong view, old fellow. There probably isn't a man over in that militia brigade who wouldn't make a smart enough regular if he enlisted."

"Now, I don't know about that," argued Corporal Noll seriously.

"I can remember the time, not very long ago, Noll, when you and I were greener than any militiaman over yonder."

"We were green," admitted Corporal Terry,

"but not green in the same way that those state troops are. Some how, regulars and militiamen are quite a different proposition from the very first day."

"True," agreed Corporal Hal. "But what makes the difference?"

"Well, what does?"

"The difference in officers, and in the methods that can be used. Militia officers have to make soldiering the study of their leisure hours, just as the guardsmen in the ranks do. Our regular officers are first given a hard training, and then make a life study of soldiering. Keep those guardsmen in camp for three months, and put regular officers over them all the time, and I tell you, Noll, they'd make most of us regulars look hard to our laurels."

"I don't know," muttered Corporal Terry dubiously.

"Then you want to think it over," retorted Hal. "Just remember that regulars and militiamen are both enlisted from the people at large. Put any militia regiment in the country through a regulation three-years' enlistment in the Army and under regular officers, and that militia regiment would then be the equal of any regular regiment in the line. Noll, the whole difference lies in officers, opportunity and training. Don't ever look down on national guardsmen unless

you want to prove yourself less of a soldier than I think you are."

"Corporal Terry!" summoned Sergeant Gray, and Noll hurried off to some new duty, but he was thinking. Corporal Hal had shown him how to look at the national guardsmen from another point of view.

The day was one of arduous duties, but with nightfall came a period of rest. More, some of the regulars in each company, troop or battery were granted town leave. There was a trolley line near at hand that carried many a pleasure-loving regular into town.

Corporals Overton and Terry went by themselves.

"As we have never seen Denver, I guess it will be about enough for us to look around and see what we can of the town, won't it?" proposed Hal.

"Yes; if we keep to the main streets. I feel as though I may want to squander a bit of my pay on ice cream and such frothy trifles," returned Noll.

"We won't spend it, anyway, on anything that will make us forget the limits of our leave and turn delinquents," returned Hal.

"Small danger of that," retorted Corporal Terry. "That game doesn't go with the making of good soldiers."

"I don't believe Captain Cortland will have any delinquents to deal with this time," predicted Hal. "He doesn't intend to have the Mason City business done over again."

Denver proved full of delights to these soldier boys, who had really seen very little of the world.

But, being under orders to return to camp not later than midnight, the time came when they must think of getting back.

"I wonder what's the quickest way to the trolley line?" pondered Noll.

"We'll ask our way," Hal answered.

They had no trouble in getting clear directions from a passing citizen. The shortest way led down through a narrow street that appeared to belong to a rough part of the city.

"I wouldn't care to live on this street," smiled Noll.

"Hardly," agreed Hal. "Yet I guess it won't hurt us any just to walk through."

Ere the soldier boys had gone more than two blocks their attention was attracted by sounds of a commotion in a crowd just ahead.

A crowd had started to collect, and was every moment increasing in size.

"Wonder what's up?" murmured Noll Terry, as the soldier boys quickened their pace.

"Some earthquake in the under world, I suppose," returned Hal.

Just then the scream of a woman's voice reached them.

"Shame! shame!" cried half a dozen male voices in protest.

Then the same voice sounded, in sobs this time.

Hal Overton had broken into a run, and Noll was almost at his side. The soldier boys pushed their way into the crowd.

A brutish, square-jawed young fellow of twenty-one or twenty-two, dressed loudly, and with an ill-smelling cigar between his teeth at one side of his mouth, held a sobbing girl by the wrist.

"Cut out the boo-hoo story, Lizzie, and come along with me to the dance," he ordered gruffly.

"I don't want to go," faltered the terrified girl. "You know well enough, Bill, that my mother don't want me going to dances with you."

"What's your old woman got against me?" demanded the young brute.

"You know well enough, Bill, that mother don't like you, and that she'd sooner see me dead than running around with you."

"She won't have her wish to-night, then, Liz. You're going to waltz with me. You know that wot I say goes, and it's the hop for yours to-night."

"Shame!" cried some one back in the crowd. "Let the girl go home."

"Mind your own biz," growled back the bully, "or I'll step over there and make some changes in yer style of face."

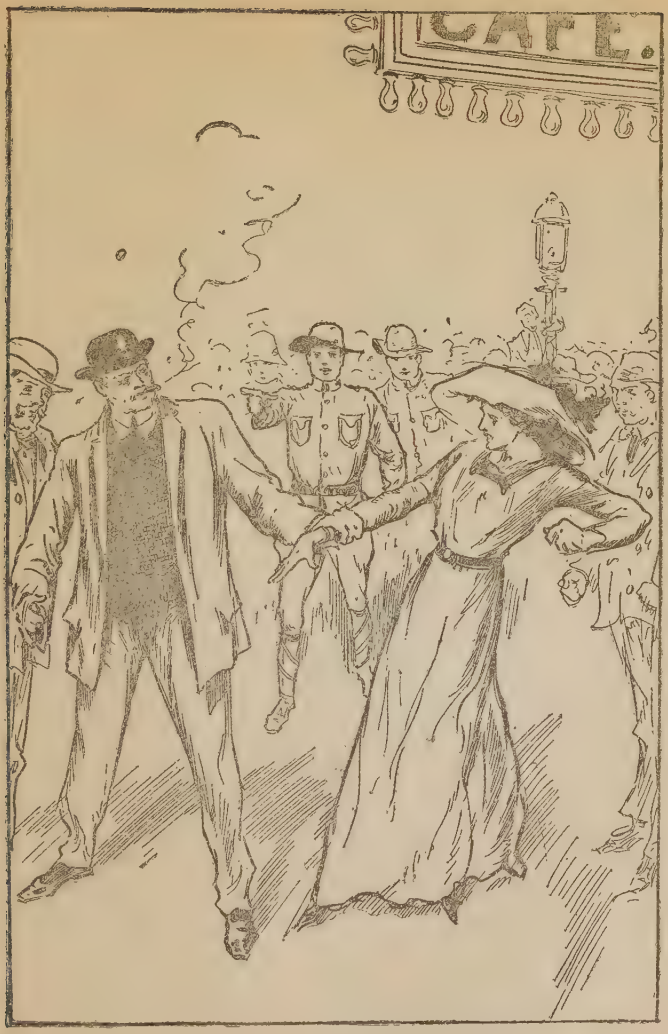
Evidently Bill was known as an ugly customer. Close to him, on the other side from the girl, stood another man, somewhat older and exhibiting the promise of even more brute strength. Plainly he stood by to back Bill up against interference that the crowd might want to attempt. The pair of bullies were such as a city crowd usually doesn't care to risk meddling with.

"Wipe off the boo-hoo, Lizzie, and come along," ordered the fellow who held the girl's wrist. "No use of making a fuss. You're headed for the waltz with me."

"Shame!" some one in the crowd had courage enough to utter again, as Bill, still holding the girl's wrist, started to force her along the sidewalk.

"What do you more decent people expect to do by just talking?" Corporal Hal Overton demanded angrily.

"Hullo, brass-button boy!" called Bill cheerily, turning and leering at the youthful-looking corporal. "When did you blow out of the sewer?"



"Let Go That Young Lady's Wrist."

"If that young lady wishes to go home, let her do so," ordered Hal sternly.

"So?" queried Bill mockingly. "But maybe that won't suit me."

"Then let go of the young lady's wrist, for you'll need both hands up in front of you," warned Hal, springing forward, his hot blood flushing his face with righteous anger.

"Get out, ye tin-soldier militiaman!"

"If it makes any difference," retorted Hal, "we happen to be regulars."

"No difference at all," the young brute leered. "I eat both kinds!"

"Let go that young lady's wrist!"

"Sure!"

Bill did so, and the girl shrank back through the pressing crowd. But Bill aimed a crushing blow at Corporal Hal Overton.

Hal wasn't just on the spot to receive it. But the next instant he and Bill were exchanging hard blows at a rate that made the crowd yell with delight.

"Go it, Bill! Go it, buttons!"

Bill's tough friend reached out to hit Hal from the side. Corporal Noll jumped in, throwing up the fellow's arm. There were two real fights on now.

How it would have ended it would be impossible to say. Strong, daring and skilled though

they were, the soldier boys might have been beaten by superior strength.

But a heavy, blue-coated figure darted in, scattering the combatants. Then a Denver policeman gripped both Hal and Noll by the collar.

"Stop it! Stop, I tell ye!" ordered the policeman gruffly.

"Ye've got good game there, Johnson," called out the fellow Bill. "They're a nasty pair of brass buttons. They insulted my girl, and then pitched into me and my friend."

"I'll run these soldier-loafers in, Bill," agreed the policeman. "We've got too many of these soldier-loafers in the country. It's time for some of 'em to learn something."

For Bill and his friend were a pair of amateur thugs who were most useful to the ward's ruling political machine. Bill and his friend were often extremely useful in cleaning out hostile primaries, and in other dirty work incidental to city politics.

"Officer!" protested Corporal Hal.

"Shut up, ye loafer!" ordered the policeman.

"But this is——"

"Will ye shut up, now?"

The policeman gave the soldier boy a vigorous shaking.

"The soldiers were in the right of it, Johnson," protested a voice in the crowd.

"Now, can yer gab, or I'll run you in, too," warned Johnson hoarsely. At that dread warning opposition died out in the weak-kneed crowd.

"Now, come along, ye young loafers in brass buttons," commanded the policeman. "Bill, you and your friend be in court in the morning."

"Sure we will," chuckled Bill.

"Officer, will you let me explain?" insisted Hal, as the two young corporals started down the street on either side of the policeman, who kept a rough grip on the arm of either.

"Pickle it, and tell it all to the judge in the morning," retorted the policeman gruffly.

Some of the crowd—Bill's friends, evidently—followed, hooting and abusing all soldiers in general.

Four blocks away Hal and Noll were lined up before the officer in charge at a station house.

"Assaulting Bill Dabner and his friend and insulting Bill's girl," announced Policeman Johnson gruffly.

"I hope now, sir, we can have a chance to explain," protested Hal, looking squarely at the officer behind the desk.

"Did you see all this business, Johnson?" asked the officer at the desk.

"Yes," lied the policeman glibly. "I caught 'em at it."

"You men can save your explanations for the judge in the morning," wound up the officer at the desk. "Cell number twelve, Johnson."

Down below the cell door clanged on two white-faced, angry young soldier boys. It was a serious thing, they knew, for ambitious soldiers to have a clash with the civil authorities.

"We'll lose our corporal's chevrons through this," Noll predicted.

"Yes," assented Corporal Hal Overton, his eyes flashing. "But I can't help it if we do. It's worth that price to be a man!"

CHAPTER XXII

TWO YOUNG CORPORALS SEND OUT THE "C. Q. D."

WHEN the two young corporals had had time to cool down somewhat, Hal made a racket on his cell door until a house policeman came to see what was wanted.

"Will you bring me paper and an envelope?" Hal asked.

"Want to make your will, I suppose," jeered the policeman.

"No; I intend to write a note to my company commander."

"Is he out at camp?"

"Yes."

"Who do you think is going to take the note out there?"

"Call a messenger boy, and I will pay him for going out there," Corporal Hal replied.

"I don't believe the lieutenant at the desk will do it," returned the policeman.

"See here," Hal went on, warming up perceptibly, "we are members of the United States forces, under detention by the civil authorities. Now, the civil authorities have full right to arrest United States soldiers on proper charges. We'll let the question pass of whether we've

been properly arrested. But, as members of the United States Army, we have a right to communicate with our commanding officer. If this isn't done, the governor of Colorado is quite likely to hear from Washington. Now, we demand paper and envelope, and also that a messenger boy be called to take our letter."

"I don't know what the lieutenant will say——" began the house policeman dubiously.

"Of course you don't." Hal broke in. "So go and find out what he says, won't you? And you might explain to him my version of what is likely to happen if he fails to give us a chance to communicate promptly with Captain Cortland."

Twenty minutes passed.

"They're just laughing at us," muttered Noll.

"Then in the morning they may find where the laugh really belongs." Hal retorted.

"Hush! Here comes some one."

It was the house policeman, returning with stationery and a messenger boy.

Taking a pencil from one of his pockets, Hal wrote at some length, though he tried to make his letter as brief as possible.

"Got any matches, boy?" Hal asked of the waiting messenger.

The boy passed a small box in through the grating of the door.

"Here, stop that!" warned the policeman, though he reached forward too late to stop the passing of the matches.

"You shall have them back in a moment," Hal promised the boy.

Drawing a piece of sealing wax from another pocket, Hal lighted a match, dropping the hot wax over the flap of the envelope.

"Here, you can't do that," warned the house policeman, who, however, could get the cell door key only by going upstairs to the desk.

"But I've already done it," smiled Hal.

Noll handed his chum a signet ring, which Hal pressed into the wax.

"That won't go," muttered the policeman. "The lieutenant won't have it. He has to see all letters that go out of this station."

"Then let your lieutenant break the seal, or interfere in any way with the prompt delivery of an official communication between a member of the United States Army and his commanding officer, and see what will happen to your lieutenant upstairs. If the lieutenant is a friend of yours you might call that little point to his attention," Hal retorted, with a cool smile, as he passed the envelope to the messenger.

"How much will it be to deliver that letter promptly out at the camp?" Corporal Overton inquired.

The messenger boy named the sum, to which Overton added carfare and a little "tip."

"As quickly as you can, please, boy. And report to your manager in case the lieutenant, or any other policeman attempts to hinder or bother you on this work. We shall want your report as evidence if you are interfered with."

"Say, that kid corporal downstairs knows all his rights," declared the house policeman admiringly to the lieutenant, after the messenger had departed unmolested.

"He'll forget a large part of what he knows, after he's been before the judge in the morning," replied the lieutenant, lighting a cigar. "Soldiers, as well as citizens, can be punished, and Johnson has a clear case against that pair of soldier kids."

For the next two hours Hal and Noll took turns pacing back and forth within the narrow confines of the cell in which they had been thrust.

"I guess we're not going to hear anything to-night," muttered Hal disappointedly at last. "Noll, we may as well get some of the sleep that's coming to us."

Young soldiers accustomed to sleeping on the ground did not find it extremely hard to get to sleep on the hard wooden benches. More than that, they contrived to get a pretty fair rest before they were awakened in the morning by

a station-house trusty who thrust two chunks of bread and two tin cups of coffee into the cell.

"Get that down and be ready to go to court," called the trusty as he passed along.

Breakfast eaten, the two young corporals had a lot more time on their hands before a squad of policemen came downstairs and began to busy themselves with marshaling the prisoners and driving them toward a basement door.

Here, mingled with the scum of the city, in the persons of other prisoners, two unoffending young soldiers of the United States Army were forced to enter the dark interior of a covered wagon. A steel door was slammed into place and locked and the ride began.

In a few minutes they were let out, superintended by a guard of other policemen, and driven into another basement. Here, in a dark, dingy, foul-smelling room, this batch of prisoners was herded with those from other police stations.

A lot of time passed. Occasionally court policemen came into the room, selected more prisoners and drove them out toward a stairway.

At last it came the turn of Corporals Hal and Noll. They were taken from the room, up an iron staircase, and then pushed into the pen of a police court.

"Henry Overton and Oliver Terry!" called a clerk.

"There's yer cue," announced a gruff court policeman, pointing to the two young soldiers. He conducted them to the front of the pen where they stood facing a police magistrate.

The clerk announced the charge against them, then ordered wearily:

"Prisoners, hold up your right hands. You do solemnly swear——"

The two young corporals had been duly sworn to tell the truth.

"Where's the arresting officer?" demanded Judge Guffey.

Policeman Johnson came forward, held up his hand and was sworn.

Then the policeman started to tell the story of what he claimed to have seen. According to this evidence, Noll and Hal had first insulted a young woman with whom Bill Dabner was walking at the time. Bill had naturally resented the insults, and then the soldiers had violently assaulted Bill and his male friend, while the girl broke through the gathering crowd and fled for home.

Then Bill came forward, in his best, loudest clothes, and with his hair much greased. Bill's story, under oath, put a few flourishes to Policeman Johnson's plainer tale. Bill's friend was also there and backed up all that the policeman and Dabner had said.

"We have plenty of other witnesses, your honor, if you desire to examine more," interposed the policeman.

"Where's the young woman herself?" queried Judge Guffney.

"Home in bed, ill from the shock, your honor," Bill asserted gravely.

"Prisoners at the bar, have you anything to say?" queried Judge Guffey. "Overton?"

"I've a lot to say, your honor."

In tones ringing with indignation, Corporal Hal Overton, United States Army, gave his version of the affair. Bill Dabner listened with a broad, impudent grin, as Hal told the true story of the encounter of the night before.

Then Noll spoke in his own behalf.

"I saw the assault myself, your honor, and have other witnesses here for our side if you wish to hear them," said Policeman Johnson.

"This testimony is very much confused," commented Judge Guffey at last. "But the evidence of the police officer is evidently worth that of all the other witnesses combined, for the policeman has no personal prejudices in the matter. Prisoners at the bar, you appear to have forgotten that you were sworn into the Army and enrolled among the defenders and protectors of the country. It is no light thing to insult a young woman, even if she does happen

to belong to the poorer classes of society. Prisoners, such conduct as yours, under any circumstances, is a disgrace to the splendid uniform that you wear. Soldier hoodlumism shall find no more sanction in this court than any other kind of rowdyism. I sentence you each, therefore——"

Judge Guffey's voice paused for a moment, as though the magistrate were thinking deeply.

Then he added:

"——to thirty days in the workhouse!"

CHAPTER XXIII

THE WIND CHANGES ITS COURSE AND BLOWS

IT was a dazing, fearful blow to two lads who had acted in accordance with their highest ideals of right.

"Step down there," ordered the court officer, giving the young corporals a light shove.

"You've got yours."

Policeman Johnson, Bill Dabner and the latter's crony turned to leave, as though satisfied that they had done their duty.

At the back of the courtroom there was a slight commotion. Some one there was endeavoring to push his way through the throng.

"Your honor, one moment!" called a deep, manly voice. "Before the case of the two soldiers is disposed of I wish——"

It was some one in uniform at the back of the court room. More Judge Guffey could not ascertain at that moment.

"Who spoke then?" demanded the magistrate.

"My name is Cortland, your honor. I am captain of the company to which the two corporals belong."

At the first sound of that voice Hal and Noll had turned back to the front of the pen.

"Get down below, you!" scowled the court officer.

"Will you be good enough to hold your tongue, my man?" asked Corporal Hal in a quiet voice, though his eyes flashed. "That's our captain speaking, and his is the voice we follow."

"Let the prisoners wait," directed Judge Guffey, sending the court officer an annoyed glance. "Make way for Captain Cortland to come forward."

Policeman Johnson and Bill and his friend were trying to get out of the court room, but the magistrate called to them to come back.

"Captain," continued the magistrate, "I regret to say that the evidence proved that your two men most wantonly insulted a young woman on the streets last night, and then attacked her escort and a friend."

Captain Cortland, as he came to a halt below the bench in that crowded court room, presented a fine appearance that was in distinct contrast with his surroundings.

"With due respect for the court, your honor, I don't believe that any such disgraceful conduct was engaged in by my young men."

"But even the policeman's testimony bears out that of the real complainants, Captain," replied Judge Guffey courteously.

"Your honor, I don't know your policeman,

but I do know my two young men, Corporals Overton and Terry. I am as positive as I can be of anything that neither young soldier is of the kind to allow himself to get into any kind of disgraceful affair. There are no men in my company for whom I entertain deeper respect than I do for Corporals Overton and Terry. Your honor, may I ask that this case be re-opened?"

"I would gladly extend you that courtesy, Captain Cortland, but the evidence has all been heard. As I understand it, Captain, you can testify only to the previous good character of the prisoners. You were not a witness of last night's occurrence?"

"I was not, your honor, but I know my two young men so well that I feel certain, sir, that you are unwittingly aiding in a miscarriage of justice. Will the court be good enough to outline the nature of the evidence?"

Briefly Judge Guffey outlined the story of the prosecution, and also the opposed story told by Corporals Overton and Terry.

"Your honor may think me unduly trustful," smiled Captain Cortland, "but I would believe the story of my men over the testimony of a hundred men such as these complainants seem to be."

Captain Cortland took a side look at Bill and

his friend, who unaccountably shivered under that scrutiny.

"Has the young woman herself appeared in court, your honor?" resumed B Company's captain. "Has she testified?"

"I understand," replied Judge Guffey, "that the young woman is ill in bed as a result of the shock of last night's occurrence."

"Then, your honor," asked Captain Cortland, "may I ask a continuance of this case until the testimony of the young woman herself may have been heard, and until I can look up other evidence? And will you accept my personal bail for Corporals Overton and Terry in the meantime?"

"I want to show you every courtesy possible, Captain," began Judge Guffey.

"And I ask nothing, your honor, except that my men have every opportunity for impartial justice."

While this conversation had been going on an extremely mild-mannered man in rather dingy black, had been quietly working his way forward. He had just succeeded in passing a card to the clerk of the court and in adding a few whispered words.

"Your honor," interposed the clerk, "here is another witness who offers, and wishes to be heard. He can bring us tidings of the young

woman who has been mentioned in connection with this case."

Judge Guffey took the card, reading from it:

"Dr. Alexander McKenzie."

"That is my name, sir," replied the quiet man.

"What do you know of this case, Doctor?"

"Not much, sir, but it may be important," replied the physician. "I was called in this morning by the mother of one Lizzie McAndrew, the girl mentioned in this affair. Miss McAndrew is quite ill this morning, as the result of a nervous shock, but her mind is clear enough. She begged me particularly to come to court to see that two brave and gallant young soldiers did not come to harm through befriending her."

Captain Cortland uttered a low-voiced, triumphant exclamation.

At a motion from the clerk Dr. McKenzie started around toward the pen to be sworn.

Policeman Johnson, his face violently red, whispered a few words in the ear of the physician as the latter passed.

"Now, don't bother me with your talk," retorted the physician in a rather loud voice, and Johnson drew back.

"What did that policeman say to you?" demanded the magistrate as soon as the medical man had been sworn.

"He told me to look out what I said, or I'd

get myself in big trouble down in the district," replied Dr. McKenzie promptly.

"I never——" began Johnson, his face paling.

"Put that policeman under arrest!" thundered the magistrate.

A court officer moved over and stood beside the now much-disturbed Johnson.

Dr. McKenzie testified to the serious condition in which he had found Lizzie McAndrew this morning. He was not permitted to repeat any of the young woman's statements in her own words, but was allowed to state the gist of what Miss McAndrew had said.

"May I interrupt the court long enough to ask if there is not now enough evidence to warrant postponing this hearing for a few days?" inquired Captain Cortland.

"I won't do it," replied Judge Guffey bluntly. "Plainly enough this has been one of the court's foolish mornings. I am now convinced that the testimony on which I had sentenced these two young soldiers was false evidence. Corporals Overton and Terry are discharged from custody."

Hal and Noll were about to step from the pen to join their captain when the magistrate interrupted:

"To you young military gentlemen I wish to offer the court's apology. I apologize, also, in

the name of the State of Colorado and of the city of Denver. There is no calling more honorable than that of the soldier, who offers his comfort, his life and his blood for his country at need. The soldier who forgets the high nature of his calling and descends to rowdyism cannot be too severely punished, but the soldier who lives up to the high traditions of his calling cannot be too well commended. Policeman Johnson, step forward. Bear in mind that you are still under oath. In what work or business are Dabner and his friend engaged?"

"Why, your honor, I—I——"

"Have they any regular calling that you ever heard of?"

"Your honor, I don't know," stammered the policeman.

"Isn't it true that this precious pair seldom work?" pressed the magistrate.

"I—I'm afraid, your honor——"

"Policeman Johnson, go to the complaint clerk and swear to two short complaints charging Dabner and his estimable friend with vagrancy."

Johnson changed color swiftly three or four times, but he went in a daze to carry out his instructions.

As for Bill Dabner and his friend, they looked as though they were seeing ghosts. They did

not attempt to speak until they were ordered to step into the pen and be sworn.

Then Policeman Johnson was called to the stand. Reluctantly he testified that the new prisoners were well known to be loafers, making a living mainly by their wits.

Dabner and his friend were then asked to testify in their own behalf, but they were too badly overwhelmed to be able to say much.

"Prisoners," said Judge Guffey, gazing at them in sheer disgust, "it would give me great pleasure to bind you over for the grand jury on charges of perjury committed this morning. But I feel disinclined to take any action that may drag these young soldiers away from their own duties. Therefore, on the charge of vagrancy, I sentence you each to two years in the workhouse. Take those prisoners below at once."

Bill and his crony seemed barely able to walk when they were forced below.

"Policeman Johnson, come forward! Do you desire to offer any denial of the evidence concerning the charge that Dr. McKenzie made against you a few minutes ago?"

Johnson opened his mouth to speak, but under the stern gaze of the police magistrate he found it impossible to persist in his denial.

"Johnson, for attempting to intimidate a witness in this court I sentence you to thirty days'

confinement at the workhouse. I shall also see to it that a full account of this matter reaches the chief of police. That is all."

Captain Cortland thanked the court heartily. Then, with his young soldier boys following, he made his way from the court room. Dr. McKenzie was at their heels when they reached open air, and a pleasant chat of a few moments followed.

"Men, I would have come to you much sooner than I did," explained Captain Cortland, "but an accident happened that couldn't be helped. Through some stupidity your messenger left your note over among the militiamen, and it did not reach me until this morning. Then I came as fast as I could travel."

The heartiest thanks of all three soldiers were extended to Dr. McKenzie, after which the Army party started back to camp.

Hal's adventures for the day, however, were by no means yet ended.

As the three entered the regular's infantry camp, Captain Cortland caught sight of a horse being held before his tent by one of his infantry privates.

"I want to talk with you two a moment," remarked B Company's commander, "but I see that I have a visitor from the cavalry. Wait outside until I summon you."

The horse, a beautiful animal, very plainly belonged to the cavalry, for the saddle blanket and trappings were trimmed with yellow, which is the cavalry color.

"Had much work this morning, Claxton?" Hal asked of the private soldier who was holding the horse's bridle.

"We've been going some, Corporal," replied Claxton, with a smile. "And it was hot in the sun to-day, too."

"Even at that," observed Corporal Hal grimly, "I guess you had it easier here than we did."

"You've been in some trouble, Corporal?"

"Yes, but now it's——"

Corporal Hal Overton never finished that sentence. At that instant all three became aware of a great clatter up the field.

A pair of horses attached to a light victoria came racing down the field, passing close to the head of the infantry camp.

There was no driver on the seat; the reins were trailing at the heels of the runaways.

Nor did it take more than a glance to show that both of the runaways were now frightened past all hope of stopping them by any simple expedient.

Less than a quarter of a mile down the field two regular and two militia field batteries were

drawn up in a long line, squarely in front of the path of the flying horses.

Worse still, the horses belonging to the batteries had been detached and sent to the rear. There were some four hundred artillerymen in all near the guns, but not one of them mounted in this period of instruction.

The horses seemed bound to dash in among the closely aligned field guns, wrecking the victoria and probably killing the woman and girl who now stood up in the vehicle screaming with terror, but seemingly too frightened to jump.

This Corporal Hal saw in his one swift glance, as the outfit went by like a whirlwind.

What he didn't see the soldier boy didn't even stop to guess.

"Let go, Claxton!" he shouted, snatching the bridle from the orderly's hand.

All in a twinkling Hal was up in saddle and urging the magnificent cavalry animal forward.

CHAPTER XXIV

CONCLUSION

SCORES of brave, quick-witted men in uniform were leaping forward to use their sweeping arms to divert the runaways.

But Corporal Hal's swift glance forward as he bent over the neck of the cavalry horse and urged it forward showed that these soldiers could not possibly save the woman and girl in the victoria.

To whichever side the horses might be forced into dodging, the wild, snorting animals would still run over blocking soldiers and bring up in a confused tangle of wreckage among the guns.

"On—on with you!" roared Corporal Hal, beating the horse's flank with one hand and cudgeling with his heels.

That cavalry mount was a magnificent beast. Corporal Overton was quickly up alongside the victoria. Then he gained on the horses.

"Now, in close, you good old brute!" glowed Overton, though his lips were bloodless as he took the chance and threw the bridle over.

Bending sideways from the saddle, Corporal Hal reached the bridle of the nigh horse.

Now he hung on grimly to the bridle of the

runaway, at the same time using his other arm to bring the splendidly trained cavalry horse back on its haunches.

That nigh runaway was checked, somewhat, but the pull threatened to drag Corporal Hal's left arm out of its socket.

Something had to give way!

Then, with a suppressed yell, Overton felt himself being torn from saddle.

He held on. The runaways tried to forge ahead at renewed speed, but the determined doughboy soldier, holding still to the bridle of one of the animals, put a big check on the speed of the runaways.

A few yards further they dashed, then slowed. Now a score of artillerymen, regular and militia, sprang in and seized the animals just as Corporal Hal Overton, his uniform torn and dust-grimed, and he himself bleeding, fell in the dust.

But the runaways were stopped, and other soldiers assisted the woman and her fourteen-year-old daughter in safety to the ground.

Back of them all the fine cavalry horse stood trembling and curious. This cavalry horse, struck by the wheels of the victoria, now showed blood spots along his glistening, lathered flanks.

"Get up, messmate," called one of the regular artillerymen, bending over Overton. "You did

the whole trick like an Army man, and the ladies want to thank you."

He helped Hal to his feet. The soldier boy trembled slightly and almost unconsciously put a hand to his head.

"Your hat, mate? We'll help you find that."

But Hal's hand had gone to a cut on his head from which blood was oozing, for just as he went down one of the horses had struck him a glancing kick there.

It was Corporal Noll Terry, who sprinting desperately along the field, espied his chum's campaign hat and picked it up with hardly a slackening of his speed.

But Noll did run more slowly when he saw Overton again standing on his feet. Now Noll gently approached the cavalry horse, whose bridle reins dangled.

"Easy now, boy," urged Noll as he approached and reached for the lines.

He secured them, then gently led the cavalry mount over toward the crowd.

"Hurt much, Hal?" hailed Noll.

"No; nothing worth talking about."

A soldier had said something about the woman and the girl wishing to thank Corporal Hal, but that man had spoken without looking, for now the woman lay on the grass in a dead faint, while the girl bent over her.

"Noll," spoke Corporal Overton, "at last accounts I believe we were supposed to be standing in front of Captain Cortland's tent, awaiting his summons. I guess we'd better be hurrying back to get on our job."

Noll led the horse at first. By and by Hal reached over and secured the bridle, pausing just an instant to stroke the animal's neck.

"You're a fine old fellow," Hal murmured, gazing wistfully at the horse.

"Let's keep right on back," urged Noll. "Remember, we're here really against orders."

Neither soldier boy thought of mounting the animal for a ride back. No need existing, either would have thought it a big piece of impudence to mount an officer's horse unbidden.

Captain Cortland was standing before the door of his tent, watching the approach of his soldier boys. Beside Cortland stood another officer, down the outer side of whose trousers' legs ran the broad, yellow stripe of the cavalry. This gentleman was Captain Ellis.

"We're in for it, I reckon," muttered Corporal Hal to his chum as they drew nearer to Cortland's tent. "Leaving when under orders, and taking an officer's horse, at that. Well, here's for our medicine!"

Both soldier boys stepped forward holding themselves as erect as ever, just the same.

Then, halting before the captain's tent, they came very formally to the salute.

"Captain Cortland, I am obliged to report, sir, that I left here when under orders. I have also to report that, seeing the danger of a serious accident to others, I had the impudence to impress an officer's horse. Unfortunately, sir, that animal now appears to be injured."

"I have also, sir, to report leaving in the face of other orders," Noll Terry stated gravely.

"In view of the reasons that lay behind your acts," replied Captain Cortland, with only the faintest twinkle of a smile. "I think we shall have to conclude that discipline has not suffered a serious affront this time."

"I am very sorry, indeed, sir, that I rode your fine animal to any injury," continued Corporal Hal, turning and saluting the cavalry captain.

"Pooh!" scoffed Captain Ellis, stepping to one side and surveying the cuts on his mount's flank. "Nothing but a few scratches, Corporal —and a whole horse is as nothing compared with human lives. We got out in time to see your handsome work, Corporal, and all I'm sorry for is that we haven't you in the cavalry."

"Thank you, sir."

"You can't have these non-coms. of mine for yellow-legs, Ellis," laughed Captain Cortland.

"You have just seen what a fine pair of young soldiers they are. I intend to keep them right here in B Company."

"You always were a selfish fellow, Cortland," laughed Captain Ellis.

"You are hurt, are you not, Corporal?" queried Captain Cortland, turning to Hal Overton.

"Nothing but a little scratch and a lump on my head, sir. I had forgotten it until you asked."

"Go over to hospital tent, Corporal Overton, and have your head dressed. Corporal Terry, you may go with your friend if you wish."

As the two young corporals saluted and turned away, Captain Cortland stood gazing after them for a few moments, while Private Claxton walked the horse up and down.

"Ellis, you don't often find such a snappy, all-around good pair of young soldiers, do you?" asked B Company's commander.

"Oh, I don't know," replied Captain Ellis. "I have a few like them in my troop, I guess."

"My dear fellow, I'm from Missouri," laughed Captain Cortland.

We would gladly carry the present narrative further, but here the present tale is obliged to end, for there were no other developments of an interesting nature while the encampment

with the Colorado National Guard continued. This period was filled with nothing beyond the ordinary routine of camp instruction life, and when it was all over Major Silsbee's battalion of the Thirty-fourth gladly enough returned to Fort Clowdry.

Our gallant soldier boys will be a little older when next we meet them, as we shall do in the next volume in this series, which will be published under the title, "Uncle Sam's Boys as Sergeants; Or, Handling Their First Real Commands." In this coming volume we shall see to just what extent they made good as non-coms., and whether, in the broader sense, they proved themselves the all-around soldiers that their conduct up to date has seemed to assure. In the next volume will be described much of both the work and the play that fall to the regular Army soldier's lot, and many rousing adventures and ludicrous happenings will therein be told.

The End

HENRY ALTEMUS COMPANY'S

Best and Least Expensive Books for Boys and Girls

The Motor Boat Club Series

By H. IRVING HANCOCK

The keynote of these books is manliness. The stories are wonderfully entertaining, and they are at the same time sound and wholesome. No boy will willingly lay down an unfinished book in this series.

1 THE MOTOR BOAT CLUB OF THE KENNEBEC; Or, The Secret of Smugglers' Island.

2 THE MOTOR BOAT CLUB AT NANTUCKET; Or, The Mystery of the Dunstan Heir.

3 THE MOTOR BOAT CLUB OFF LONG ISLAND; Or, A Daring Marine Game at Racing Speed.

4 THE MOTOR BOAT CLUB AND THE WIRELESS; Or, The Dot, Dash and Dare Cruise.

5 THE MOTOR BOAT CLUB IN FLORIDA; Or, Laying the Ghost of Alligator Swamp.

6 THE MOTOR BOAT CLUB AT THE GOLDEN GATE; Or, A Thrilling Capture in the Great Fog.

7 THE MOTOR BOAT CLUB ON THE GREAT LAKES; Or, The Flying Dutchman of the Big Fresh Water.

Cloth, Illustrated Price, per Volume, $1.00

Sold by all booksellers or sent postpaid on receipt of price.

Henry Altemus Company

1326-1336 Vine Street Philadelphia

Battleship Boys Series

By FRANK GEE PATCHIN

These stories throb with the life of young Americans on today's huge drab Dreadnaughts.

1 THE BATTLESHIP BOYS AT SEA; Or, Two Apprentices in Uncle Sam's Navy.
2 THE BATTLESHIP BOYS' FIRST STEP UPWARD; Or, Winning Their Grades as Petty Officers.
3 THE BATTLESHIP BOYS IN FOREIGN SERVICE; Or, Earning New Ratings in European Seas.
4 THE BATTLESHIP BOYS IN THE TROPICS; Or, Upholding the American Flag in a Honduras Revolution.
5 THE BATTLESHIP BOYS UNDER FIRE; Or, The Dash for the Besieged Kam Shau Mission.
6 THE BATTLESHIP BOYS IN THE WARDROOM; Or, Winning their Commissions as Line Officers.
7 THE BATTLESHIP BOYS WITH THE ADRIATIC CHASERS; Or, Blocking the Path of the Undersea Raiders.
8 THE BATTLESHIP BOYS' SKY PATROL; Or, Fighting the Hun from Above the Clouds.

Price, $1.00 each

The Range and Grange Hustlers

By FRANK GEE PATCHIN

Have you any idea of the excitements, the glories of life on great ranches in the West? Any bright boy will "devour" the books of this series, once he has made a start with the first volume.

1 THE RANGE AND GRANGE HUSTLERS ON THE RANCH; Or, The Boy Shepherds of the Great Divide.
2 THE RANGE AND GRANGE HUSTLERS' GREATEST ROUND-UP; Or, Pitting Their Wits Against a Packers' Combine.
3 THE RANGE AND GRANGE HUSTLERS ON THE PLAINS; Or, Following the Steam Plows Across the Prairie.
4 THE RANGE AND GRANGE HUSTLERS AT CHICAGO; Or, The Conspiracy of the Wheat Pit.

Cloth, Illustrated — Price, per Volume, $1.00

Submarine Boys Series

By VICTOR G. DURHAM

1 THE SUBMARINE BOYS ON DUTY; Or, Life on a Diving Torpedo Boat.
2 THE SUBMARINE BOYS' TRIAL TRIP; Or, "Making Good" as Young Experts.
3 THE SUBMARINE BOYS AND THE MIDDIES; Or, The Prize Detail at Annapolis.
4 THE SUBMARINE BOYS AND THE SPIES; Or, Dodging the Sharks of the Deep.
5 THE SUBMARINE BOYS' LIGHTNING CRUISE; Or, The Young Kings of the Deep.
6 THE SUBMARINE BOYS FOR THE FLAG; Or, Deeding Their Lives to Uncle Sam.
7 THE SUBMARINE BOYS AND THE SMUGGLERS; Or, Breaking Up the New Jersey Customs Frauds.

Grace Harlowe Overseas Series

1 GRACE HARLOWE OVERSEAS
2 GRACE HARLOWE WITH THE RED CROSS IN FRANCE.
3 GRACE HARLOWE WITH THE MARINES AT CHATEAU THIERRY.
4 GRACE HARLOWE WITH THE AMERICAN ARMY IN THE ARGONNE.

The College Girls Series

By JESSIE GRAHAM FLOWER, A.M.

1 GRACE HARLOWE'S FIRST YEAR AT OVERTON COLLEGE.
2 GRACE HARLOWE'S SECOND YEAR AT OVERTON COLLEGE.
3 GRACE HARLOWE'S THIRD YEAR AT OVERTON COLLEGE.
4 GRACE HARLOWE'S FOURTH YEAR AT OVERTON COLLEGE.
5 GRACE HARLOWE'S RETURN TO OVERTON CAMPUS.
6 GRACE HARLOWE'S PROBLEM.
7 GRACE HARLOWE'S GOLDEN SUMMER.

All these books are bound in Cloth and will be sent postpaid on receipt of only $1.00 each.

Pony Rider Boys Series

By FRANK GEE PATCHIN

These tales may be aptly described the best books for boys and girls.

1 THE PONY RIDER BOYS IN THE ROCKIES; Or, The Secret of the Lost Claim.—2 THE PONY RIDER BOYS IN TEXAS; Or, The Veiled Riddle of the Plains.—3 THE PONY RIDER BOYS IN MONTANA; Or, The Mystery of the Old Custer Trail.—4 THE PONY RIDER BOYS IN THE OZARKS; Or, The Secret of Ruby Mountain.—5 THE PONY RIDER BOYS IN THE ALKALI; Or, Finding a Key to the Desert Maze.—6 THE PONY RIDER BOYS IN NEW MEXICO; Or, The End of the Silver Trail.—7 THE PONY RIDER BOYS IN THE GRAND CANYON; Or, The Mystery of Bright Angel Gulch.

Cloth, Illustrated — Price, per Volume, $1.00

The Boys of Steel Series

By JAMES R. MEARS

Each book presents vivid picture of this great industry. Each story is full of adventure and fascination.

1 THE IRON BOYS IN THE MINES; Or, Starting at the Bottom of the Shaft.—2 THE IRON BOYS AS FOREMEN; Or, Heading the Diamond Drill Shift.—3 THE IRON BOYS ON THE ORE BOATS; Or, Roughing It on the Great Lakes.—4 THE IRON BOYS IN THE STEEL MILLS; Or, Beginning Anew in the Cinder Pits.

Cloth, Illustrated — Price, per Volume, $1.00

The Madge Morton Books

By AMY D. V. CHALMERS

1 MADGE MORTON—CAPTAIN OF THE MERRY MAID.
2 MADGE MORTON'S SECRET.
3 MADGE MORTON'S TRUST.
4 MADGE MORTON'S VICTORY.

Cloth, Illustrated — Price, per Volume, $1.00

West Point Series

By H. IRVING HANCOCK

The principal characters in these narratives are manly, young Americans whose doings will inspire all boy readers.

1 DICK PRESCOTT'S FIRST YEAR AT WEST POINT; Or, Two Chums in the Cadet Gray.
2 DICK PRESCOTT'S SECOND YEAR AT WEST POINT; Or, Finding the Glory of the Soldier's Life.
3 DICK PRESCOTT'S THIRD YEAR AT WEST POINT; Or, Standing Firm for Flag and Honor.
4 DICK PRESCOTT'S FOURTH YEAR AT WEST POINT; Or, Ready to Drop the Gray for Shoulder Straps.

Cloth, Illustrated — Price, per Volume, $1.00

Annapolis Series

By H. IRVING HANCOCK

The Spirit of the new Navy is delightfully and truthfully depicted in these volumes.

1 DAVE DARRIN'S FIRST YEAR AT ANNAPOLIS; Or, Two Plebe Midshipmen at the U. S. Naval Academy.
2 DAVE DARRIN'S SECOND YEAR AT ANNAPOLIS; Or, Two Midshipmen as Naval Academy "Youngsters."
3 DAVE DARRIN'S THIRD YEAR AT ANNAPOLIS; Or, Leaders of the Second Class Midshipmen.
4 DAVE DARRIN'S FOURTH YEAR AT ANNAPOLIS; Or, Headed for Graduation and the Big Cruise.

Cloth, Illustrated — Price, per Volume, $1.00

The Young Engineers Series

By H. IRVING HANCOCK

The heroes of these stories are known to readers of the High School Boys Series. In this new series Tom Reade and Harry Hazelton prove worthy of all the traditions of Dick & Co.

1 THE YOUNG ENGINEERS IN COLORADO; Or, At Railroad Building in Earnest.
2 THE YOUNG ENGINEERS IN ARIZONA; Or, Laying Tracks on the "Man-Killer" Quicksand.
3 THE YOUNG ENGINEERS IN NEVADA; Or, Seeking Fortune on the Turn of a Pick.
4 THE YOUNG ENGINEERS IN MEXICO; Or, Fighting the Mine Swindlers.

Cloth, Illustrated — Price, per Volume, $1.00

Boys of the Army Series

By H. IRVING HANCOCK

These books breathe the life and spirit of the United States Army of to-day, and the life, just as it is, is described by a master pen.

1 UNCLE SAM'S BOYS IN THE RANKS; Or, Two Recruits in the United States Army.
2 UNCLE SAM'S BOYS ON FIELD DUTY; Or, Winning Corporal's Chevrons.
3 UNCLE SAM'S BOYS AS SERGEANTS; Or, Handling Their First Real Commands.
4 UNCLE SAM'S BOYS IN THE PHILIPPINES; Or, Following the Flag Against the Moros.
6 UNCLE SAM'S BOYS AS LIEUTENANTS; Or, Serving Old Glory as Line Officers.
7 UNCLE SAM'S BOYS WITH PERSHING; Or, Dick Prescott at Grips with the Boche.
8 UNCLE SAM'S BOYS SMASH THE GERMANS; Or, Winding Up the Great War.

Dave Darrin Series

By H. IRVING HANCOCK

1 DAVE DARRIN AT VERA CRUZ; Or, Fighting With the U. S. Navy in Mexico.
2 DAVE DARRIN ON MEDITERRANEAN SERVICE.
3 DAVE DARRIN'S SOUTH AMERICAN CRUISE.
4 DAVE DARRIN ON THE ASIATIC STATION.
5 DAVE DARRIN AND THE GERMAN SUBMARINES.
6 DAVE DARRIN AFTER THE MINE LAYERS; Or, Hitting the Enemy a Hard Naval Blow.

The Meadow-Brook Girls Series

By JANET ALDRIDGE

1 THE MEADOW-BROOK GIRLS UNDER CANVAS.
2 THE MEADOW-BROOK GIRLS ACROSS COUNTRY.
3 THE MEADOW-BROOK GIRLS AFLOAT.
4 THE MEADOW-BROOK GIRLS IN THE HILLS.
5 THE MEADOW-BROOK GIRLS BY THE SEA.
6 THE MEADOW-BROOK GIRLS ON THE TENNIS COURTS.

All these books are bound in Cloth and will be sent postpaid on receipt of only $1.00 each.

High School Boys Series

By H. IRVING HANCOCK

In this series of bright, crisp books a new note has been struck. Boys of every age under sixty will be interested in these fascinating volumes.

1 THE HIGH SCHOOL FRESHMEN; Or, Dick & Co.'s First Year Pranks and Sports.
2 THE HIGH SCHOOL PITCHER; Or, Dick & Co. on the Gridley Diamond.
3 THE HIGH SCHOOL LEFT END; Or, Dick & Co. Grilling on the Football Gridiron.
4 THE HIGH SCHOOL CAPTAIN OF THE TEAM; Or, Dick & Co. Leading the Athletic Vanguard.

Cloth, Illustrated — Price, per Volume, $1.00

Grammar School Boys Series

By H. IRVING HANCOCK

This series of stories, based on the actual doings of grammar school boys, comes near to the heart of the average American boy.

1 THE GRAMMAR SCHOOL BOYS OF GRIDLEY; Or, Dick & Co. Start Things Moving.
2 THE GRAMMAR SCHOOL BOYS SNOWBOUND; Or, Dick & Co. at Winter Sports.
3 THE GRAMMAR SCHOOL BOYS IN THE WOODS; Or, Dick & Co. Trail Fun and Knowledge.
4 THE GRAMMAR SCHOOL BOYS IN SUMMER ATHLETICS; Or, Dick & Co. Make Their Fame Secure.

Cloth, Illustrated — Price, per Volume, $1.00

High School Boys' Vacation Series

By H. IRVING HANCOCK

"Give us more Dick Prescott books!"

This has been the burden of the cry from young readers of the country over. Almost numberless letters have been received by the publishers, making this eager demand; for Dick Prescott, Dave Darrin, Tom Reade, and the other members of Dick & Co. are the most popular high school boys in the land. Boys will alternately thrill and chuckle when reading these splendid narratives.

1 THE HIGH SCHOOL BOYS' CANOE CLUB; Or, Dick & Co.'s Rivals on Lake Pleasant.
2 THE HIGH SCHOOL BOYS IN SUMMER CAMP; Or, The Dick Prescott Six Training for the Gridley Eleven.
3 THE HIGH SCHOOL BOYS' FISHING TRIP; Or, Dick & Co. in the Wilderness.
4 THE HIGH SCHOOL BOYS' TRAINING HIKE; Or, Dick & Co. Making Themselves "Hard as Nails."

Cloth, Illustrated — Price, per Volume $1.00

The Circus Boys Series

By EDGAR B. P. DARLINGTON

Mr. Darlington's books breathe forth every phase of an intensely interesting and exciting life.

1 THE CIRCUS BOYS ON THE FLYING RINGS; Or, Making the Start in the Sawdust Life.
2 THE CIRCUS BOYS ACROSS THE CONTINENT; Or, Winning New Laurels on the Tanbark.
3 THE CIRCUS BOYS IN DIXIE LAND; Or, Winning the Plaudits of the Sunny South.
4 THE CIRCUS BOYS ON THE MISSISSIPPI; Or, Afloat with the Big Show on the Big River.

Cloth, Illustrated — Price, per Volume, $1.00

The High School Girls Series

By JESSIE GRAHAM FLOWER, A. M.

These breezy stories of the American High School Girl take the reader fairly by storm.

1 GRACE HARLOWE'S PLEBE YEAR AT HIGH SCHOOL; Or, The Merry Doings of the Oakdale Freshman Girls.
2 GRACE HARLOWE'S SOPHOMORE YEAR AT HIGH SCHOOL; Or, The Record of the Girl Chums in Work and Athletics.
3 GRACE HARLOWE'S JUNIOR YEAR AT HIGH SCHOOL; Or, Fast Friends in the Sororities.
4 GRACE HARLOWE'S SENIOR YEAR AT HIGH SCHOOL; Or, The Parting of the Ways.

Cloth, Illustrated — Price, per Volume, $1.00

The Automobile Girls Series

By LAURA DENT CRANE

No girl's library—no family book-case can be considered at all complete unless it contains these sparkling twentieth-century books.

1 THE AUTOMOBILE GIRLS AT NEWPORT; Or, Watching the Summer Parade.—2 THE AUTOMOBILE GIRLS IN THE BERKSHIRES; Or, The Ghost of Lost Man's Trail.—3 THE AUTOMOBILE GIRLS ALONG THE HUDSON; Or, Fighting Fire in Sleepy Hollow.—4 THE AUTOMOBILE GIRLS AT CHICAGO; Or, Winning Out Against Heavy Odds.—5 THE AUTOMOBILE GIRLS AT PALM BEACH; Or, Proving Their Mettle Under Southern Skies.—6 THE AUTOMOBILE GIRLS AT WASHINGTON; Or, Checkmating the Plots of Foreign Spies.

Cloth, Illustrated — Price, per Volume, $1.00

Altemus' Adventure Books for Boys

There isn't a dull page in one of these books.

The Grammar School Boys Series

THE GRAMMAR SCHOOL BOYS OF GRIDLEY.
THE GRAMMAR SCHOOL BOYS SNOWBOUND.
THE GRAMMAR SCHOOL BOYS IN THE WOODS.
THE GRAMMAR SCHOOL BOYS IN SUMMER ATHLETICS.

The High School Boys Series

THE HIGH SCHOOL FRESHMEN.
THE HIGH SCHOOL PITCHER.
THE HIGH SCHOOL LEFT END.
THE HIGH SCHOOL CAPTAIN OF THE TEAM.

The High School Boys' Vacation Series

THE HIGH SCHOOL BOYS' CANOE CLUB.
THE HIGH SCHOOL BOYS IN SUMMER CAMP.
THE HIGH SCHOOL BOYS' FISHING TRIP.
THE HIGH SCHOOL BOYS' TRAINING HIKE.

The Young Engineers Series

THE YOUNG ENGINEERS IN COLORADO.
THE YOUNG ENGINEERS IN ARIZONA.
THE YOUNG ENGINEERS IN NEVADA.
THE YOUNG ENGINEERS IN MEXICO.
THE YOUNG ENGINEERS ON THE GULF.

Altemus' Annapolis Series

DAVE DARRIN'S FIRST YEAR AT ANNAPOLIS.
DAVE DARRIN'S SECOND YEAR AT ANNAPOLIS.
DAVE DARRIN'S THIRD YEAR AT ANNAPOLIS.
DAVE DARRIN'S FOURTH YEAR AT ANNAPOLIS.

The Battleship Boys Series

THE BATTLESHIP BOYS AT SEA.
THE BATTLESHIP BOYS' FIRST STEP UPWARD.
THE BATTLESHIP BOYS IN FOREIGN SERVICE.
THE BATTLESHIP BOYS IN THE TROPICS.
THE BATTLESHIP BOYS UNDER FIRE.
THE BATTLESHIP BOYS IN THE WARDROOM.
THE BATTLESHIP BOYS WITH THE ADRIATIC CHASERS.
THE BATTLESHIP BOYS ON SKY PATROL.

Altemus' West Point Series

DICK PRESCOTT'S FIRST YEAR AT WEST POINT.
DICK PRESCOTT'S SECOND YEAR AT WEST POINT.
DICK PRESCOTT'S THIRD YEAR AT WEST POINT.
DICK PRESCOTT'S FOURTH YEAR AT WEST POINT.

The Conquest of the United States Series

THE INVASION OF THE UNITED STATES.
IN THE BATTLE FOR NEW YORK.
AT THE DEFENSE OF PITTSBURGH.
MAKING THE LAST STAND FOR OLD GLORY.

The Boys of the Army Series

UNCLE SAM'S BOYS IN THE RANKS.
UNCLE SAM'S BOYS ON FIELD DUTY.
UNCLE SAM'S BOYS AS SERGEANTS.
UNCLE SAM'S BOYS IN THE PHILIPPINES.
UNCLE SAM'S BOYS ON THEIR METTLE.
UNCLE SAM'S BOYS AS LIEUTENANTS.
UNCLE SAM'S BOYS WITH PERSHING.
UNCLE SAM'S BOYS SMASH THE GERMANS.

Dave Darrin Series

DAVE DARRIN AT VERA CRUZ.
DAVE DARRIN ON MEDITERRANEAN SERVICE.
DAVE DARRIN'S SOUTH AMERICAN CRUISE.
DAVE DARRIN ON THE ASIATIC STATION.
DAVE DARRIN AND THE GERMAN SUBMARINES.
DAVE DARRIN AFTER THE MINE LAYERS.

The Motor Boat Club Series

THE MOTOR BOAT CLUB OF THE KENNEBEC.
THE MOTOR BOAT CLUB AT NANTUCKET.
THE MOTOR BOAT CLUB OFF LONG ISLAND.
THE MOTOR BOAT CLUB AND THE WIRELESS.
THE MOTOR BOAT CLUB IN FLORIDA.
THE MOTOR BOAT CLUB AT THE GOLDEN GATE.
THE MOTOR BOAT CLUB ON THE GREAT LAKES.

The Submarine Boys Series

THE SUBMARINE BOYS ON DUTY.
THE SUBMARINE BOYS' TRIAL TRIP.
THE SUBMARINE BOYS AND THE MIDDIES.
THE SUBMARINE BOYS AND THE SPIES.
THE SUBMARINE BOYS' LIGHTNING CRUISE.
THE SUBMARINE BOYS FOR THE FLAG.
THE SUBMARINE BOYS AND THE SMUGGLERS.
THE SUBMARINE BOYS' SECRET MISSION.

The Pony Rider Boys Series

THE PONY RIDER BOYS IN THE ROCKIES.
THE PONY RIDER BOYS IN TEXAS.
THE PONY RIDER BOYS IN MONTANA.
THE PONY RIDER BOYS IN THE OZARKS.
THE PONY RIDER BOYS IN THE ALKALI.
THE PONY RIDER BOYS IN NEW MEXICO.
THE PONY RIDER BOYS IN THE GRAND CANYON.
THE PONY RIDER BOYS WITH THE TEXAS RANGERS.
THE PONY RIDER BOYS ON THE BLUE RIDGE.
THE PONY RIDER BOYS IN NEW ENGLAND.
THE PONY RIDER BOYS IN LOUISIANA.
THE PONY RIDER BOYS IN ALASKA.

The Circus Boys Series

THE CIRCUS BOYS ON THE FLYING RINGS.
THE CIRCUS BOYS ACROSS THE CONTINENT.
THE CIRCUS BOYS IN DIXIE LAND.
THE CIRCUS BOYS ON THE MISSISSIPPI.
THE CIRCUS BOYS ON THE PLAINS.

Cloth, 12mo, Illustrated. Price per Volume, $1.00

HENRY ALTEMUS COMPANY PHILADELPHIA